



HENRIK IBSEN

# THE LIFE OF IBSEN

Halvdan Koht

VOLUME ONE

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

Professor Koht's *Life of Ibsen* was first published in Norwegian under the title *Henrik Ibsen, En Diktarlev*. The first volume appeared in 1928 for the centenary of Ibsen's birth, the second, in 1929. The author has revised his work for the American edition, eliminating some purely Norwegian references, and expanding slightly where consideration of the non-Norwegian reader required it.

The English version is the work of Ruth Lima McMahon and Hanna Astrup Larsen. Where extracts from Ibsen's early poems are inserted in the text as throwing light rather on his state of mind at the time than on his poetic art, the translators have rendered them in an English form as near to the literal meaning of the original as possible. Where standard versions of Ibsen's prose or poetic works already exist, these have been used in all quotations, and indebtedness is acknowledged to the following: *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, Entirely Revised and Edited by William Archer*; *Lyrics and Poems*, translated by F. E. Garrett, and *Early Plays*, translated by Anders Orbeck.

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## **The Life of Ibsen**



## Chapter One

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### THE POET

**H**ENRIK IBSEN was a poet. This would seem self evident, yet it may be useful and even necessary to establish the fact definitely from the beginning. Too many have attempted to make him a thinker or a philosopher, a social critic or a social reformer. He himself was fully conscious that his genius was that of the creative artist, and he desired to be not merely an artist first and foremost, but wholly and in all things an artist.

He once expressed in a single word the meaning of poetic art. To a young man who himself dreamed of becoming a poet he said "To be a poet is to *see*." While the definition was intended as a lesson and an admonition to the young man, its content expressed a deep craving, nay an imperative demand of Ibsen's own nature. It was not only or chiefly that he must note, physically, the details of his surroundings and reproduce them with the greatest possible accuracy, but rather that he needed to see not only with his eyes but also with his imagination. He became a dramatist by virtue of his irrepressible impulse to recreate in visible images everything that moved within his mind. Everything that struck him with such force that he could not let it go, every thought kindled in him, he must embody in living forms. To do so was a necessity of his nature.

The vision did not always come to him in a flash. On the

contrary, he often had to struggle hard and long before the images took clear shape in his mind, but if at first they seemed to stand afar off in a mist, dim and shadowy, he bored and broke a path to them with a passion as if his life were at stake—and gave them life. He was driven by an inner compulsion that would not let him rest until he could see his own thoughts standing before him in clear and tangible form.

There is a close inner harmony, therefore, between this epigram about seeing and a little verse that he wrote at another time on the art of poetry:

*What is life? a fighting  
In heart and in brain with trolls  
Poetry? that means writing  
Dooms day accounts of our souls*

It was with himself he wrestled, as his thoughts strained and struggled their way to life and poetic form. In the work proceeding thus from strife and brought into the world in an agony as of birth pangs, there must be, as he said of *Peer Gynt*, a large measure of "self-dissection." It must be, as he time and again pointed out, completely and intimately "lived through", and the highest and richest values are found in those of his writings where he has given himself most wholly and intensely, holding nothing back.

The impulse to form his mental images into self-existent shapes was in a sense the one pole of his genius, the other pole, which was opposite to and requisite for this creative power, was a remarkable susceptibility to the movements of life about him. He was infinitely sensitive, even morbidly so. It seems to be this quality which makes the artist's nature different from that

of others his soul is more delicate, and therefore every thing that approaches it sets the spiritual nerves vibrating To an unusual degree Henrik Ibsen was inwardly aware of every thing that went on about him—images, words, people, and incidents fastening upon his soul as if by main force Almost unconsciously he sensed the thoughts that were in the air

Not everything, naturally, wrought in him with equal force If one would know what gripped him hardest, what it was that more than anything else whetted his desire to mold it anew into living forms, one must seek it in those works in which he revealed himself most fully and clearly, and which are therefore his greatest, namely, his writings from *Love's Comedy* to *Rosmersholm* Here it may readily be seen that his powers were stirred to their mightiest motion by those things which kindled his wrath He might have applied to himself the familiar words of the satirist Juvenal *indignatio facit versus*, anger creates poetry, and indeed he did say, more than once, with an expression borrowed from Holberg, that he held office as Royal Norwegian "State Satirist" It was in times when anger welled most richly and powerfully within him that his imagination fostered his most vital and robust creations, and that the greatest joy flowed into his work He was himself exultantly conscious that his genius grew with his anger, and he seemed to feel a wanton joy in giving life to the characters who were to bear the brunt of his wrath

What was it, then, that made him most fervently angry? Invariably it was the violation of his great ethical ideal It was an ethical wrath that set him afire Yet Ibsen laid down no specific moral injunction to which he demanded obedience He had no

clearly formulated code of ethics. But one single great and inescapable ideal he did possess: that human beings should be true to themselves and whole souled in their action, that they should always and in all things give themselves without reservation and carry to the very end the consequences of their thoughts and desires. His anger was aroused by deceit, untruth, by a half sincere playing with life and work, which seemed to him utterly pitiable—although he was himself incapable of pity.

His ethics was at bottom a religion. It was a demand placed upon humanity by higher powers whom man had only to obey. These powers, which controlled human life and human will, he called God. If he had a personal image of God, one may be sure that it was the image of a stern Jehovah, a chastiser and judge who mercilessly flung aside all shams and rubbish.

Within Ibsen himself there dwelt a relentless need to take life with the utmost seriousness, and above all to remain true to the task ordained to him. The religious element in this demand was the belief that each individual *has* a task ordained to him in the world. As this demand was turned into a rule of conduct, it became ethical.

Calls to battle come naturally from an author of such temper, but, be it remembered, his works are literature—not text books in ethics or in anything else. It was with no intention of solving for humanity the riddle of life that Ibsen wrote. If any one demanded this of him, he turned the demand aside.

*I do but ask, my call is not to answer*

The thing that he wanted, the thing that was his need, his gift, his call, was to hold up before people their responsibility in living images. He must and would fuse his anger, his demands,

and his visions in the forms of human creatures who conquered  
*or broke faith* They were taken from life and were given a  
second life

To Ibsen, this work was, at one and the same time, life and  
poetry



## Chapter Two

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### RACIAL HERITAGE

**T**HERE is a quality in Ibsen's temperament which both his own countrymen and people of other nations feel to be peculiarly Norwegian. We recognize the very type of our race in this silent man who broods, and turns things over in his own mind, getting angrier and angrier as he looks at the shams round about him, until finally he bursts into a wild fury and wants to throw the whole world into a red hot casting ladle. At such times he may remind us of the Old Testament Jehovah who lets fire rain down upon the earth, but he also suggests a Norwegian revolutionist who wants to tear up the world by the roots in order to build it anew from the foundations.

Ibsen seems least Norwegian during those early years when he was himself an enthusiast for the Norwegian national movement, when he wrote festival poems and festival dramas for respectable citizens upon all sorts of national occasions. It is in revolt, when he begins to ridicule things Norwegian, and to declare judgment upon society, that he suddenly becomes truly Norwegian—we are tempted to say the most Norwegian of all our authors.

It was during this period of revolt that he fled from the country to live abroad for almost thirty years, finding sometimes a bitter joy in declaring that he had nothing to do with the Norwegian people, and almost boasting that there was not a drop of Norwegian blood in his veins.

Is it really true that he owed nothing to Norwegian heritage?

Speaking generally, we have to admit that one of the things which we understand least of all is the secret of how great talent, or genius, is given birth in a man. Even if we knew all his forefathers, we still have no science that can explain how the heritage from all these sources combined to form his mind and temperament. It appears inescapably true that a man's family and racial origin form the very groundwork of his mental as well as his physical characteristics, and we invariably expect, therefore, a similarity to the people from whom he is descended. Yet how little we know of the laws of heritage which determine the bent of his mind!

While Ibsen had among his ancestors a great many immigrant foreigners, chiefly Danes and Germans, and earlier in the line probably some Scots, it is clearly absurd to see in this fact the reason why he was able to cut himself off from the land of his birth and make himself a world citizen—which, for that matter, he never thoroughly succeeded in doing. Similarly, it is loose talk to say that a mental heritage of Scotch puritanism or German speculativeness left traces in his intellectual life, for we have not the slightest evidence that those Scotchmen and Germans from whom he descended possessed a single puritanical or speculative trait.

The name Ibsen is Danish. A skipper, Peter Ibsen, from the town of Stege in Møn, settled in Bergen about 1720 and married there. His wife was the daughter of an immigrant Hanoverian merchant, Heinrich Holtermann. It was from this German that the name Henrik came into the Ibsen family.

One of the sons of Peter Ibsen was named Henrik Ibsen. He

was born in 1726, and like his father he was a skipper making his home in Bergen. He died, before his father, at the age of thirty nine, soon after he had married. His only son, who was also christened Henrik, was brought into the world after his death, in the year 1765.

This child's mother, the wife of the first Henrik Ibsen, is the person who is said to have brought Scottish blood into the family. Her name was Wenche Dishington, and the surname, at least, seems Scotch or English, but if we trace the family into more remote times we find that it had lived in Bergen for at least four generations and had intermarried with people of German and probably also of Norwegian origin. Of the Scotch there was certainly not much that remained.

Be that as it may, Wenche Dishington determined to a great extent the future of the Ibsen family. After being a widow for some years, she married again, this time a clergyman in Bergen, Jacob von der Lippe, who soon after, in 1771, became parish pastor in Solum, near Skien. The son of her first marriage, the second Henrik Ibsen, was at that time a boy six years old, and as a matter of course he moved with them to the new location. Thus the Ibsen family was divided, one branch remaining in Bergen, another moving to Skien.

Though removed to a far distant part of the country, the second Henrik Ibsen followed the trade of his father and grandfather. He, too, became a skipper, making his home in the town of Skien. When about thirty two years old, he was drowned at sea, the ship, according to report, being lost with all hands, off Grimstad. This must have been in the winter of 1797-98.

A couple of years earlier he had married the daughter of a

merchant of Skien, Johanne Cathrine Plesner, who like her husband had a Danish grandfather. Indeed, she had more Danish blood than he, for both her grandfather and her grandmother had come from the Danish town of Kærteminde, the old seaport of Odense. Her mother's family being chiefly German, she brought into the Ibsen family about the same mingling of races that was there before.

This woman, who became the paternal grandmother of the dramatist Henrik Ibsen, may well have been known by him, as she attained an age of seventy-seven years and did not die before 1847, three or four years after he moved away from Skien. In one respect, at least, her influence on his life is clear: she united the Ibsens with the Paus family. Barely a year after her first husband died, she married another Skien skipper, Ole Paus, with whom she lived to the end of her life. Had she lived a few months longer, they would have celebrated their golden wedding. This couple had many children, whom Ibsen later regarded as his uncles and aunts. The oldest son, Henrik Johan, who bore the name with which the author also was baptized, entered official life and became sheriff. The second son, "Uncle Christian," was town judge in Skien for many years, beginning in 1847. These Paus people were the nearest relatives that Henrik Ibsen had in Skien, outside of his own home. Ibsen's grandmother also brought him into relationship with other important people of the town, two of her sisters being married to prominent merchants of Skien, Diderik Cippelen at Gjemsoy and Johan Blom. In short, Cathrine Plesner brought the Ibsen family into the aristocracy of Skien.

By her first marriage she had one son, Knud Ibsen, named

after his maternal grandfather, Knud Plesner. Of this man, who became the father of the third and last Henrik Ibsen, we have a more personal knowledge than we have of his forefathers, but before we study more closely his life and character, we must glance briefly at the family from which he took his wife.

In 1825 he married Marichen Altenburg, whose surname is clearly German, though there is no definite information available as to the origin of the family. It had, at any rate, been in the country through five generations and since the time of the late seventeenth century, the first person we know of by this name being then a magistrate in Follo. Marichen's father, Johan Altenburg, was first skipper and later merchant in Skien, and his grandfather, son of the magistrate, had been the first man of this name to settle in the town. As this grandfather was of Danish descent through his maternal ancestors, and as his wife bore a German family name, we again meet the Danish German mixture of races which is characteristic of the Norwegian townspeople of the eighteenth century.

The mother of Johan Altenburg, grandmother of the future Marichen Ibsen, was named Marichen Barth and came from Kragerø. On her father's side she belonged to a family which had come in from Saxony in the early 1600's, but on her mother's side her ancestors were Norwegian, the earliest of those we know being the town judge, Roland Knudsen, one of the provincial verse-makers of the middle seventeenth century. In an attempt to trace everything to heritage, one might suggest that Henrik Ibsen's poetic ability had its origin in this Roland Knudsen of whom he was a descendant in the sixth

generation, and one might thereby give the honor for his poetic genius to a Norwegian ancestry, but unfortunately there is not the faintest similarity or relationship between the poetry of Henrik Ibsen and the dry as dust, knotty verses of Heir Roland—verses that cannot have had any heritable power in them

Maichen Ibsen's mother, Hedeveg Paus, was a sister of the Ole Paus who was married to Henrik Ibsen's paternal grandmother, she herself being, as we see, his grandmother on the maternal side. He knew this grandmother, too, for she lived until 1848, being then more than eighty-four years old. Through her he was brought into the Paus family by blood relationship, an important fact concerning the racial soil from which he sprang, as Hedeveg Paus was of almost pure Norwegian stock on both sides. Her mother's family were working people at Kongsberg. Her father's family name, Paus, though it has a foreign sound, is in reality a modified form of Paalsson, and an example of how the Norwegians thought it elegant to give a foreign touch to their names. The Paus people were a family of officials having their home in Telemark, and we know that one of them composed verses in the Telemark dialect early in the eighteenth century. Here one might again suggest a definitely Norwegian origin for Henrik Ibsen's poetic gift. I think, however, it will suffice to say that, at least through his maternal grandmother, he had a full stream of Norwegian blood in his veins. Various Norwegian strains had come from other ancestors as well.

What we learn from this genealogy is that Henrik Ibsen had exactly the origin which we may call typical for people of the old Norwegian middle class, most of the lines of ancestry going

back to Denmark and Germany, some turning westward to Scotland, and a considerable number remaining at home in Norway. Those which arise outside of the country had reached Norway in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Of all the sixteen great great grandparents of Henrik Ibsen only three, Peter Ibsen and the Plesner couple, were born outside of Norway. Great grandparents and grandparents were all at home in the Norwegian middle class, and if this class in many respects lacked a national stamp, being bound to Denmark in its cultural life, it was still a part of the Norwegian community and helped to build what was to become Norwegian tradition. Surely we dare say with much greater certainty that the small town middle class society of Norway left its imprint on Ibsen's mind than that his remote Danish and German ancestors left such an imprint.

Of earlier talent in the family we know practically nothing that would foreshadow such a poetic genius as that of Henrik Ibsen, and we can no more than mention a trait here and there which indicates the family heritage in his temperament.<sup>1</sup>

Of his mother and her family we know least of all. Marichen Ibsen was exactly what a wife and mother should be according to the standards of the time. She devoted herself entirely to the home, and perhaps especially to the children, and she accepted every circumstance of her fate with patient courage. There was never a bitter word in her. She was like Inga, the king's mother in *The Pretenders*, who without complaint allowed herself to be sent away, and who wished never to be a burden to anyone.

<sup>1</sup> Most of what we know on this subject was collected by Henrik Jæger in his book about Ibsen (1888). His source of information is Ibsen's sister Fru Hedvig Stousland, and some things I have myself written down from conversations with her.—H. K.

Ibsen himself has told us that he drew the picture of his mother in this character, and "with necessary exaggerations" she also became Ase in *Peer Gynt*. It was the boundless love of motherhood that Ibsen had found in her. She held her children in



THE ONLY PICTURE OF IBSEN'S MOTHER  
MARICHEN ALFENBURG TAKEN AT THE  
TIME OF HER MARRIAGE TO KNUD IBSEN

such control that they dared not disobey her, yet they always felt that she loved them, though she spoke little.

In her old age Ibsen's mother secluded herself more and more, until she grew almost afraid of people, and in this aversion to self-revelation we can recognize one of her son's traits. He said of himself that he resembled the skald Jatgeir, in *The Pretenders*, in whose mouth he put the words "My soul has shamefastness, therefore I do not strip me when there are



many in the hall " As Jatgeir was alone in the hall with Earl Skule when the words were spoken, he must have meant that he would not reveal himself to anyone Ibsen's shyness is evident throughout his life, he found it hard to give his confidence wholly and freely, and he was prone to hide himself away lest any one should approach him too closely

In his writings he was another man There he almost shrieked out what was in his soul And it is true that no one becomes a great poet who has not courage to uncover to all the world his inmost heart and the deepest agony of his being Perhaps Ibsen's power to reveal himself wholly in poetry and drama is explained by the fact that he could so little open his heart to friends and acquaintances, and that consequently all of his inner life found expression in his writings Thus, if it be true that he had from his mother this tendency to seek solitude, we may say that she contributed something to that which made him a poet.

It is also probable that his mother had some artistic talent She drew with fair ability, though the one or two landscape pictures we have from her hand are hardly more than school exercises, and her sister, Christine Altenburg, Ibsen's only aunt on his mother's side, could both draw and paint, and left some water color landscapes which have a more personal character than those of her sister It is possible that an inherited sense of form has come to Ibsen from this source

What he has from his father's family is more tangible His grandfather, the second Henrik Ibsen, though he died so early that little is remembered of him, is said to have been a bright

and lively fellow, full of banter and fun His grandmother, Cathrine Plesner, of altogether different temperament, was a stern, serious, deeply religious woman, possessing a high degree of refinement and a keen desire to understand the questions which were of interest to her times There was in her a will to think, the strength of which we cannot now gauge, but which, if it really grips the mind, becomes truly Ibsenesque

Knud Ibsen, the son of Henrik and Cathrine, and the father of the author, seems most to have resembled his father He was a sociable man, who liked to see people and life about him, and he was quick witted and talked easily—often too easily, so that while people liked to listen to the jokes and witticisms he flung out, many were offended by a sharp sting in his words To this source of wit it seems reasonable to attribute Henrik Ibsen's great ability to invent sharp, biting phrases, an ability which he utilized fully in a dramatic character who certainly has many traits of the author's father, namely Daniel Heire in *The League of Youth*

Knud Ibsen opened a business as merchant in Skien in 1822, when he was twenty five years old, and just at a time when matters seemed to brighten in Norwegian trade after a period of serious depression Though he probably had but small capital to begin with, he had a considerable gift for speculation, and at first things went well Later, however, times did not prove so favorable as people had hoped, and before long a new period of depression forced even his uncle, Nicolai Plesner, who remained solvent throughout the hard times of 1818-21, to give up his business in 1828 The depression lasted through several

years, but when a new boom began in 1833, Knud Ibsen, throwing himself into it with unreserved hope and daring, made enormous gains. This time a sudden reversal of business in England upset the new hopes, and Knud Ibsen's concern was one of the first to fail. He went completely bankrupt in 1836.

We hear an echo of the elegant social life of Ibsen's prosperous years in the glamorous descriptions which Peer Gynt and Mother Åse give of the festal revelries at the home of the "rich Jon Gynt." Knud Ibsen was certainly a man of no small talent, but greatness in him took quite another form than it did in his son. Unhesitant daring of action did not lie in Henrik Ibsen's temperament.

Yet he was in his writing to become the most daring of adventurers. Perhaps after all he had something of his father's boldness. He at least *dreamed* of great ventures, and if he was never a jobber, he liked to play in a lottery. Adventure held a lure and a temptation for him.

## Chapter Three

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### BOYHOOD IN SKIEN

**K**NUD and Marichen Ibsen, who were married on December 1, 1825, had six children, five boys and one girl. The oldest boy died soon after the second was born. This second child was christened with the names of his two grandfathers, Henrik Johan, and as only the first name was to be used, the family now had its third Henrik Ibsen—the first to raise the name to glory and renown.

Henrik was born on March 20, 1828. Johan Andreas, named in honor of his maternal grandfather, came two years later, then the sister, Hedvig Cathrine, bearing the names of her two grandmothers, and later a brother who was christened Nikolai Alexander—a name never before heard in the family, and apparently borrowed from the house of the Russian Czar. Finally, in 1836, the last brother was born, and was given the name of his paternal grandmother's second husband, Ole Paus. It was in this group of children that Henrik Ibsen was the eldest.

He was born in the "Stockmann house," quite far down town, close to the market place and opposite the old church. The house bore the name of its owner, the merchant Stockmann—a name which Ibsen later used symbolically to designate one who is stiff as a stock. The name, in fact, belonged to a family descended from a clergyman at Stokke in Vestfold, a man who was one of Ibsen's own ancestors. One of his daughters had been married to a clergy

man named Blom, and their granddaughter had married into the Paus family and was the grandmother of Hedevig Paus Ibsen might therefore call himself a Stockmann. Indeed one of the daughters of Pastor Stockmann had been married to an Ibsen, one who had settled in Tonsberg before anyone of that name came to Bergen, and this Ibsen was a forefather of the large Flood family of Skien.

Of this relationship the Ibsens certainly had no knowledge. But the names of Ibsen and Stockmann are linked in an amusing manner in a little verse which I have found in the weekly paper, *Ugeblad for Skien*, for 1832. A certain "Copenhagen university man and poet," Chr. Leth, a sort of vagabond genius somewhat resembling Ulric Brendel in *Rosmersholm*, writes a verse of thanks for charity shown him.

*Farewell, thou kindly town of Skien,  
I now my leave am taking,  
With lighter burden, happier men,  
To better days awaking  
I'll never Ibsen's coat disdain,  
Nor vest, nor Stockmann's ringing—  
"There, take that, I have no cane"—  
Nor shirt of Boyesen's bringing*

In 1832, when Henrik was only four years old, the Ibsens moved from the Stockmann place into a house farther up town. In this city residence, with its many spacious rooms, and with its garden extending down to the town brook, the social gaieties that enlivened the days of Knud Ibsen's prosperity were at their height.

Skien, which lived on its sawmills and shipping, and had con-



HEDVIG IBSEN AT THE ACT OF THE  
*Funeral by Candlelight in the Skin Museum*





stant intercourse with foreign countries, especially with England, was in those days a lively little town. There was always something for a wide awake youngster to hear and see. A merchant aristocracy, living in the city or on the surrounding estates, had the power of wealth and culture combined, and its members, bound together by ties of blood or marriage, often came to one another's homes for dinners, balls, and musicales. The Cabinet Councilor, Niels Aall of Brekke, lived in Skien until 1830, and his cousin, Severin Løvenskiold of Fossum, went from there to Stockholm in 1828 to become Secretary of State. A near relative of both, Realf von Cappelen, lived at Borgestad, and a nephew of this man, Diderik Cappelen, lived at "the Convent" (Gjemsoy). They were closely related to both the Blom family and the Boyesen Ording family in the city itself. To this clan belonged Knud Ibsen with the families of Plesner and Paus. They formed a social circle possessing both wealth and refinement. Then, too, guests from out of town would often come and stay at the homes of acquaintances and friends. The Ibsen home was always open to such guests, and especially during Christmas and fair time the house was full and the table laid from morning till night.

Little Henrik was only eight years old when all this splendor came to an end, and it seems self evident that to so small a boy this life could not have meant much. Moreover, we hear of his childhood that as a rule he kept his own company and seldom joined his brothers and the other children in fun and play. This does not mean that he shut himself off from what went on about him. On the contrary, as he sat alone, staring and musing, it is probable that impressions from without were more deeply and permanently engraved on his soul than is the case with most



children What he himself has recorded from his childhood is neither remarkable nor important, but from traces of early childhood memories in his works, especially in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, we can see that many things must have left their marks upon him

Knud Ibsen's failure was a hard blow to him and brought changes to everyone in the household Of all their wealth nothing remained but a small farm on the estate Venstöp in Gjerpen, a couple of miles north of town, and thither they were compelled to move For seven or eight years they remained there, cut off from all their former associations They were no longer members of the aristocracy

Henrik, secluding himself more than ever before, liked to sit in a little room by himself and read whatever books he could find, or look at the pictures in them Many of the books were in English, which he could not read About one of these he has let Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* say "There is one great big book, called *Harrison's History of London* It must be a hundred years old, and there are such heaps of pictures in it At the beginning there is Death with an hour glass, and a woman I think that is horrid But then there are all the other pictures of churches, and castles, and streets, and great ships sailing on the sea" It was a folio of 1775 that remained thus in his memory, a book over which he had oftentimes pored

His imagination was stirred by the pictures, and he himself was seized with the impulse to draw Pencil and paint box became his favorite playthings He painted pictures of Fossum and other places around Skien, or romantic pictures copied from books, or he caricatured his brothers and sisters as monkeys or

other animals, when he was angry with them. Everything became pictures to him. On bits of cardboard he painted people in colorful clothes, these he cut out and fixed on wooden blocks, so they could stand, and when he had made a collection of such figures, he placed them together in groups as if they were talking to each other, some of them gaily and others seriously. It was in fact a sort of doll theater. He was extremely fond of it, and could not bear to have anyone touch it. With things of this sort he would amuse himself all alone. He often found great entertainment, too, in his own thoughts. When he happened to think of something that seemed to him funny, he would sit quietly by himself and, without making a sound, laugh until he shook.

His brothers and sisters considered him an odd specimen. He was not, even in appearance, like any other member of the family, with the possible exception of his father, to whom a resemblance came out more strongly as Ibsen himself grew old. It seemed foolish that he should always keep to himself, and therefore they teased him, throwing pebbles and snowballs at the wall to disturb his quiet and make him come out to join the others. The only thing they gained, however, was to bring him rushing out like a stormwind to drive them as far away as he could.

Henrik had a violent temper of which he sometimes gave evidence with both tongue and fist, though a word from his mother would subdue him at once. He could be kind and helpful, too, especially if the request was for something that he enjoyed doing. On one occasion he was to draw a face on a doll which his mother had made for little Hedvig. It is she herself who has told me the story. While he was busy with the doll, his sister be-

came suddenly aware that he was laughing slyly and, running in fright to her mother, cried, "Oh, now he is laughing again!" whereupon his mother came to tell him that he had better draw a proper and pretty face

"I shall be really angry if you do anything else "

"Yes," answered Henrik, "why look, mother, you see I am doing it as well as ever I can "

It was the mere thought of what a hideous face he *might* have drawn, that made him laugh The imaginative life was as real to him as the actual

Sometimes he wished to let others see how clever he was Gathering about him his brother Johan and his playfellows, he would mount a barrel and lecture to them It was dangerous sport, for it happened that he would make fun of his listeners Johan would then put an end to the lecture by upsetting with a kick the barrel on which Henrik stood

It was even better fun when on a Sunday evening he was permitted to invite the neighbors and entertain them with magic tricks Standing behind a large box, he did all sorts of remarkable things which appeared to be sheer witchcraft People thought that there was "something queer about Henrik", but the truth was that he had his brother Nicolai lying inside the box to help him with his tricks This later gave the other children a good hold on him If they threatened to tell the truth about his magic, they could make him do whatever they wished, for he had a mortal fear of everything resembling scandal—a fear that followed him all through life and had a profound effect on his career

When he entered school he began to mingle more with others

He was sent to a small private school in Skien and had to walk into town, taking between a half and three quarters of an hour each way. The school was in charge of two graduates in divinity, one of whom gave Henrik some instruction in Latin. It was Henrik's intention to study medicine and become a doctor. For the rest, his favorite school subjects were history and religion. Given a chance to talk about historical events and characters, especially from ancient times, he quickened into life, and for his class in religion he would look up every Scripture passage referred to in his text book. He wanted to get to the bottom of everything. Before long he won a reputation for unusual cleverness, yet most of the others disliked him, because he preferred to stay by himself. None the less, he had his share of both fair day fun and Midsummer frolics. He joined flocks of his school fellows in begging for tin barrels for the Midsummer bonfire, and at one time he was even a member of a festive train which carried a complete barge to the fire. When he went firing, it was chiefly to see the magicians, the rope dancers, and the horse tamers. Then he was a spectator, as he remained for the most part in other fun also. He won a few comrades with whom he went walking and talked seriously, but he took no part in either skating or sking, and never joined a party in hunting or fishing. On the whole, he was no sportsman. He was exceedingly handsome in his adolescent years, and others of his own age instinctively admired him, although they thought him disagreeable and called him names. "Get yourself away, you mean thing!" they said when he was about to leave Skien.

On October 1, 1843, at the age of fifteen and a half years, he was confirmed in the Gjerpen church, and soon after, when his

parents moved back into town, renting a house at Snipetorp, Henrik had to leave home and begin to work for his living. He himself chose to enter a chemist's shop, thinking it might be a step on the way to becoming a doctor, and accordingly he was sent to the pharmacy in Grimstad. 'No reason is known for his settling in that particular town. It was, at least, not far away.

During the years he spent in Grimstad, he returned to Skien once or twice for a visit. It was on one of these visits home that, going up the Kapittelberg, near Bratsberg, with his sister Hedvig, he told her of all that he wished to attain—the utmost perfection of greatness and clarity.

"And when you have reached that, what do you want?" she asked.

"Then I want to die," he answered.

His thoughts already flew far outside of both Grimstad and Skien, and he soon cut almost all the ties that bound him to his birthplace. After 1850 it seems that he did not set his foot there again, and, what is even more remarkable, he gave up all connection with his home, never writing letters to his parents or brothers or other relatives, with the exception of a few to his sister Hedvig. It seemed almost as if everyone at home were dead to him.

This apparently inhuman attitude is not easy to explain. Nothing that we know of his childhood can account for this separation from his parents. He may possibly have felt some bitterness against his rich relatives of the Paus family because they gave him no money for his studies, but for this his parents were surely not to blame.

We sense that there was little or no spiritual fellowship be

tween him and the folks at home. When he began to write, neither his parents nor his sister and brothers read his books. It was not until many years had passed that Hedvig began to read them. The youngest brother, Ole, at the age of eighty, ten years after the famous poet's death, had read nothing of his writings except a little of *Brand* and *Pillars of Society*. They believed that Henrik was a lost soul, for he remained outside of the religious revival into which they themselves had been swept. The pastor who took charge in Skien in 1848, G. A. Lammers, became more and more a revivalist until at last, in 1856, he gave up his pastorate, left the State Church, and organized a free church in Skien. Hedvig and Ole Ibsen joined the free church with him, and the parents, though they remained in the State Church, were also under the influence of the Lammers movement. Time and again Hedvig wrote to Henrik trying to convert him. Such attempts repelled him, and he felt himself more and more strange to those who because of blood ties should have been closest to him, but who seemed to belong to another world.

Furthermore, it was never easy for him to speak of his feelings, and he could still less lay them open in a letter. In fact, it was only when he was thoroughly angry that he could express himself fully and freely in a letter. And the longer he put off writing home, the harder it must have become for him.

"I cannot write letters, I must be present in person to give myself wholly and completely," he wrote to Hedvig in 1869, when he had received the news of his mother's death. And fond as he was of his mother, he waited almost four months before he could make himself answer the message. He wished by all means to have his sister understand that he had never been "silent

through indifference." But, he wrote, "there is so much that stands between us, between me and my home", and it is clear from his letter that he was thinking especially of the matter of religion.

When his father died, in 1877, he wrote to thank his "Uncle Christian" Paus for the help his father had received. "The chief reason," he said in this letter, "why in all these years of struggle I very seldom wrote home, was that I could not be of any help or support to my parents. I thought it was futile to write, when I could not help in any practical way. I continually hoped that my circumstances might improve, but this improvement came very late and only recently." In the same letter, however, he again pointed to the religious differences. It was these that prevented him from going to Skien. "I felt a strong disinclination to come more closely in touch with certain spiritual tendencies dominant there—tendencies with which I do not feel myself related, and to clash with which might easily have resulted in unpleasantness, or at least in a strained atmosphere which I preferred to avoid."

Life had thus opened a deep cleft between Ibsen and his home, and as he could not wholeheartedly cross the gap, he would never lay a bridge over it. For him the issue was always either for or against, nothing halfway. In 1867, writing to Bjornson about how seriously he took his relations to other people, he brought as evidence this very thing. "Do you know that I have separated myself for life from my parents—from all my kin—because I could not continue in a relation of incomplete understanding?"

Fewer and fewer were the ties that might have bound him to his native town. His brothers left home, one after another. The

oldest of them, Johan, leaving as early as 1849, settled in America, and never returned. The two youngest tried their luck as merchants, but were unfortunate, and the older of the two, Nicolai, went off to America about 1870. He was never heard from again. When the business failed, the youngest, Ole, wrote (1887) to his famous brother, asking that he put in a good word for him with Johan Sverdrup, so that he might obtain a small lighthouse post, and one sees how much a stranger to his brother Henrik Ibsen must have felt himself to be, for he forwarded the request with but a few dry words of explanation.<sup>1</sup>

It was only with Hedvig, who had married a ship's officer, Stousland, of Skien, that he maintained a connection, slight though it was. From her he borrowed both the name and the temperament of his little Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* and when they were both old, she came to visit him in Oslo. She had a warm and sweet personality, and it was a remarkable thing in her that, as she grew older, she gained a fuller and freer tolerance, even in religious matters, and could therefore better follow her brother who had broken away from what she considered true Christianity. She always spoke tenderly of him and insisted that he had a kind heart, she was sure that he loved his fellowmen and worked for their good. It was no wonder that

<sup>1</sup> The letter dated Copenhagen October 3 1887 reads as follows  
Your Excellency!

My only living brother, Ole Paus Ibsen resident at Tjømø is applying for a lighthouse post and requests that I shall in this matter be his spokesman to Your Excellency

May I on this account solicit Your Excellency's kindly reading of the enclosed letters and attestations? I myself have nothing further to add

With high esteem

Your Excellency's  
respectfully indebted  
Henrik Ibsen<sup>2</sup>



Ibsen loved this fine and strong heart, and that Hedvig became the tie between him and his home. I still remember the time, about a year before Ibsen died, when, though his spirit had already begun to sink and weaken, a strong gleam of blue shot into his half-extinguished eyes as I brought him a greeting from Hedvig.

Although he had thus himself blocked the way to his hometown, he often and in strong terms declared that he felt himself deeply rooted in Skien, and that at bottom he seemed to belong there. He spoke the truth when he said that he had always kept in touch with life at home, and his works, particularly *Brand*, bear witness that he knew what was going on there. But the thing of prime importance was that there his childish soul had first been nourished, there his abilities had been given their bent toward the path which as a grown man he would follow. Though he did not yet dream of becoming a poet, and had at most but a faint dream of being a painter, he had begun to think for himself and to form his thoughts into visible images.

Among the things that lived most strongly in his memory of childhood days in Skien was the roar of the waterfalls and the scream of the sawmills, which had filled the air from morning till night. By and by this sound in his ears came to hold a symbolic meaning for him. "Skien," he once wrote in his old age, "is the city of the roaring, rushing, seething waters. All over town the air seems filled with the song of its many cataracts." He felt that he had been in a sense consecrated by this roar of waters—had taken their turbulence into himself. "It is not for nothing that I was born in the city of roaring waterfalls." Later, when he read about the guillotine, he always had to think of the pene-

trating scream from saws in the mills. He seemed to have heard revolution and unrest from his very childhood.

Had the sound of waterfalls harbored such might, Skien should have become filled with fighting insurgents. But Henrik Ibsen remained the only revolutionist. He had the sound within himself. Before he left Skien the storm had already begun, and there was soon to be generated in him an explosive force which would burst the bounds of childhood.

## Chapter Four

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### YOUTH AND POETRY IN GRIMSTAD

“AS early as my fifteenth year,” Ibsen once wrote in an official application “I was forced to take care of myself”, and at a later time, in apology for the fact that he could not help his aged father, he said that he had shifted for himself since his fourteenth year. We may at least assume, therefore, that he was below the age of sixteen when compelled to leave home. Presumably it was just after New Year in 1844 that he came to Grimstad (more correctly spelled Grømstad) as apprentice in the chemist’s shop.

In this town he was to spend fully six years, during that period in youth which is usually most important to mental growth, and it was to him in many respects a time of *Sturm und Drang*. It was here that he became a poet.

When, twenty five years after leaving the place, he was preparing a new edition of his first drama, *Caithne*, he described with a smile of tolerant superiority these meager and yet rich days in Grimstad. The picture that remained in his mind was one of living in warfare against the little community into which life and accident had forced him.

Now what Ibsen himself relates from Grimstad has reference only to the last two years he was there, 1848–1849, while what we know from others rarely goes back beyond the fall of 1847. The fact is that concerning the first three or four years of Ibsen’s

life in Grimstad we have practically no information. We might almost call it the darkest period in the history of his life.

Certainly the period was dark for himself, too. He had already in his childhood years in Skien, at the time of his father's failure, known what it meant to be excluded from the upper class into which he was born, but in Grimstad it was ten times worse. He found here a shipowners' town, far smaller than Skien, but having an aristocracy of wealthy men and office holders at least as clearly marked, and here he had no acquaintances who could help him cross the barriers. None of the citizens in the town paid any attention to the thin, pale chemist's boy with his shock of black hair.

The chemist's shop was new, and the owner, being in narrow circumstances, could not afford to pay high wages for the help he needed. Indeed, the chemist's boy was downright poor—a fact which must have become outwardly evident, especially in his dress. Possessing a strong sense of order, Ibsen always did his work with care and accuracy and also liked to keep himself neat and trim, but he had no money to buy such clothes as would place him, in the matter of appearance, on a level with the upper class. The servant girls in the house soon noticed it (people of their station are often the first to give heed to such things), and one of them said later: "One could easily see by his clothes what he worked with during the day." Mixture boiling and plaster making left their marks, and therefore he would not eat in the dining room when the chemist's family had guests.

He had not even his own bedchamber, but slept in a room with the little boys of the family. It was not easy to make use of

his spare moments Nor were there many of them, for that matter, for he was kept constantly busy in the shop It was really only on Sundays that he was free, and then he often went out of town, either rowing out to Maloya where he found herbs for the chemist's shop, or climbing up to the cairn where he would sit and gaze out to sea, and perhaps work at his painting

Most often he was alone In all this time, between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, he made no friends His chief companion was a laborer from Telemark, Svein Mountaineer, who was employed about the shop, and with whom he made frequent Sunday trips to the Fjære churchyard Then there were also the servant girls in the house, but it was not to be expected that he would derive much intellectual benefit from them He was brought low in the scale of society during these years, and became entangled in relations of which he was ashamed, and of which he carried the consequences for many years When but eighteen years old he had a child by one of the servant girls, who was fully ten years older than himself, and for fourteen years he had to support the child He undoubtedly remembered this when he let the giant's green-clad daughter appear with her bastard before Peer Gynt, so that even Peer felt himself too soiled and odious to return to Solveig "Thoughts will sneak stealthily in at my heel"

There was but one thing in which he could take comfort and with which he could fill his thoughts during these first years in Grimstad That was the thought of his future Never giving up the hope that he would struggle through, he kept on with his studies He had brought with him from home a case full of books—his most important equipment, and when the others had

gone to bed he sat down to his reading. His plan was to pass at least a preliminary examination, and later a "Norwegian" medical examination, a lower examination by which one could still in those days attain a degree, but which was soon after abolished. He undoubtedly read many things besides those required for the examination, but as to what they were, we can hardly do more than guess.

Grimstad possessed a reading society organized in 1835, and from this he could presumably borrow books through the chemist with whom he lived. The library consisted chiefly of novels and historical works in Danish or in Danish translations. Ingemann, Walter Scott, Fredrika Bremer, Fru Gyllembourg, Dickens, and various others, as well as the writings of Holberg. We know that Ibsen also borrowed books from an old English lady, Miss Crawford, though this was probably in his later years in Grimstad. Through her kindness he was able to read Søren Kierkegaard, Oehlenschläger, and Wergeland, and thus had opportunity to establish a contact with no small part of the world's cultural life, a fact which without a doubt gave zest to his aspirations.

When he left Grimstad in 1850 he owned a small booklet into which he had copied, in handsome script, a collection of "Miscellaneous Poetry from the Years 1848, 1849, and 1850." The earliest of these poems is dated 1847, and throws a glimmer of light backward over the preceding years. In this little poem of twelve lines, with the title "Resignation," we see that Ibsen had begun to feel new powers and cravings within his soul.

—*Gleams that from the dullness*  
*Of my soul broke on the sky*  
*With the lightning's rapid fullness—*

That he had even earlier than this tried to write verse seems evident from his question

*Were my dreams a phantom train?*

*Did I wrongly then aspire,*

*Was my writing cold and vain?*

He had felt a power in himself and had begun to dream of lifting himself to greater heights, yet his way seemed blocked, and he did not know if he could give life to the things that stirred within him "My longing all in vain!" The same note is heard in the first poem of 1848, in which he compares himself with a billow dashing against the cliff in turbulent joy of battle and then sinking back into the sea to lose itself among the other waves

There is in this poetry a note of some bitterness, and we may well believe that bitter feelings had grown in his soul during these years. A girl who was a servant at the chemist's has related that he more than once said "I shall never see the day when I am in my right place," and that he complained because his father was too poor to help him. When he could speak thus to the servant girls, we may guess that things were far from well with him.

Yet he was altogether too strong to let himself be broken. These years give evidence, not only of his tough tenacity, but also of the fact that he had not lost a power which is most important in maintaining the vital force of a man, and which was fundamental in Ibsen—the power of indignation. Neither did he lose that other gift which helps to carry a man through troubled times—a lively sense of whatever is droll and laughable. Perhaps he could still sit and laugh to himself, though more than formerly he felt a desire to let others hear his laughter.

Even from the first years it is reported that boys and girls

would gather round him on the green and listen to his humorous or mocking verses about people of the town. These rhymes, which he could compose on the spur of the moment, afterwards traveled from mouth to mouth, to the amusement of the crowd and the irritation of the victims. The verses were not always very dangerous, nor very good either, but in so small a town no one liked to be made the subject for common talk, and therefore many good citizens looked askance at the poor chemist's boy. He was clever also at drawing caricatures, a talent which was at least as dangerous.

After 1847 the conditions of his life were brightened in various ways. The chemist's shop was moved from the dark, crowded house in the poor district where it had hitherto been, to a larger, better building with a more attractive location in Østregata, and there was a new owner, a young Grimstad man, who had more means than the old one, and was more inclined to make things agreeable for the young assistant. Ibsen had passed an assistant's test and, earning higher wages, could afford lessons from a young divine who came to the shop to tutor him for matriculation. His plans now went beyond the mere preliminary examination (1849 was in fact the last year in which it might be taken). He wanted to enter the University.

At this time he also began to find associates and friends. The first of these, a young clerk at the custom house, Christopher Due, was barely a year older than Ibsen. Coming to Grimstad in 1845 and soon hearing that there was something remarkable about the chemist's boy, he became curious and invented an errand to the shop. He never forgot the sharp gleam of Ibsen's eyes, and although no acquaintance developed before the chemist brought



them together, they later became friends. In the same year, 1847, there arrived in town a student of Ibsen's age, Ole Schulerud, son of the new customs officer. Due immediately brought him to the chemist's shop, and the three became intimate friends. Almost every evening they sat together in the watch room of the shop, discussing every conceivable thing between heaven and earth.

Due had a tender, lyric soul, and was shocked by Ibsen's heretical opinions about everything that seemed holy—marriage, morals, and religion. It seemed as if revolt suddenly broke loose in Ibsen. He had clearly torn himself away from the teachings and beliefs of his childhood, he would hear nothing of God, or at least nothing of a personal communion with God, nothing could stand before his criticism, he was an out-and-out radical, tearing at the roots of things, in social and political problems as well as in religion. "The times were deeply stirred," he wrote in 1875 regarding these early days. "The February Revolution, the uprisings in Hungary and elsewhere, the war in Slesvig—all these things had a mighty and maturing effect on me." His whole heart was in every movement of revolt and change.

Not finding any clear viewpoint at first, he was tossed back and forth by all the new thoughts that came rushing in upon him: deism from Voltaire, pantheism from Goethe, philosophical speculations about the origin of life on a natural basis. Using the strong language of inexperience, he describes in a poem of 1848 this wavering between "Doubt and Hope"

*The wildness of the hurricane  
Doth rage within my soul,  
Nor is there path or pilot known  
Upon the sea of doubt!*

He envied his own childhood

*Alas, I am no child now,*

*Have not the childish mind!*

He felt only the "darkness in his soul," and wished that he could believe

Yet there was no possibility of retreat While he was swept along by the tempest of the times, he found a new life and a new hope born within him and straining so violently for expression that he could not keep them to himself. He must speak out. In talking with his friends, therefore, he flung out bold and reckless hypotheses, wild paradoxes in which he threw topsy turvy every thing that had hitherto counted as truth. He abused the government for refusing to interfere firmly in the Danish Prussian war, he spoke scornfully of the great world powers which tried to suppress democracy. His cry was for freedom in all things, and he himself longed to have a hand in the fight for liberty which was shaping the world anew. Each battle in the fight found an echo in his soul. Knowing that at this time he and his friends were reading Søren Kierkegaard and debating the ideas they found in him, we may assume that Ibsen was at once seized by the burning individualism of that writer. His radicalism became at its inception a cry for personal emancipation, a rebellion against every power that suppressed the individual.

Before long people in town began to notice the young revolutionist at the chemist's shop. The good citizens shook their heads at his audacity. They found it, as he himself wrote later, "in a high degree remarkable that a young person in my inferior position should presume to discuss matters on which they themselves dared not hold an opinion." They heard that he declared himself to

be an "atheist" and a republican—he must be a dangerous fellow

Some of the young people found amusement in his gay scoffing, and quite a group of comrades would gather on Sunday evenings in the chemist's shop. Ibsen, as the center of the group, proclaimed his radical opinions and either made lampoons about people and events of the town, or portrayed them in funny drawings. The comrades often sat together far into the night, drinking punch when they could afford it, and playing cards, and not too infrequently they set out on night frolics through the town. There seems but seldom to have been any serious dissipation, for the most part it was mere youthful fun. To Ibsen it was as though his bonds were broken, and he let himself go. "It was not within my power," he wrote on a later occasion, "to give vent to all the ferment within me, except through mischief and pranks which brought upon me the ill will of all the respectable citizens who could not understand the world in which I went about struggling, alone."

His new comrades, by the way, belonged to the social class to which earlier he had not been admitted. While he did not regard them so highly but that he could make fun of them in their gatherings, he and his two friends from the custom house would feel bitterly enough the contrast between their own poverty and the wealth of the others. The association led to Ibsen's being drawn into the social life of the town. During the summer of 1849 he began to join other young people in boating parties and walking tours, and the following winter he went to balls and learned how to dance, an amusement which he had never practiced before, and in which he never attained any great skill. He was in the process

of being peacefully won by the society against which he had declared war

Both the war and the peace can be traced in his works, for it was at this time that he began in earnest to write. If he had previously doubted his creative ability, his doubt was now overpowered by hope and faith, and he intended by means of a literary product to throw himself into the struggles of the day. Like many other young revolutionary writers before him, he chose at once the greatest of all literary forms, the drama. He wrote *Catiline*.

It was in the very year of the revolution of 1848 that his Latin teacher, the divinity candidate, read with him Cicero's orations against Catiline, arousing in Ibsen an involuntary spirit of opposition. The fierce denunciation of Cicero, suggesting to him the thought that there must be something dæmonic in Catiline, made him curious. Soon after, he read Sallust, devouring the historic account of the rebellion, undoubtedly with a renewal of harsh judgment upon the criminal tendency in Catiline, but also with glimpses of great power as well as of some idealism in the revolt. It was the inner conflict in this that stirred Ibsen, and that in his thought grew quite naturally into a drama.

He did not know that many authors before him had written dramas with the same hero, nor had any Norwegian newspaper been informed that just at this time, October, 1848, a new drama on Catiline, written by the elder Dumas, had been presented in Paris. This pointless drama of intrigue could not in any case have meant much to Ibsen, for the power that attracted him to the old Roman revolutionist was something wholly personal. He felt a kinship with the ungovernable impulse to rise against the old so-

cial order and strike it down. Still more he recognized the hot desire to burst the bonds which circumstances placed on a man's will and ability to act. He knew what it was to desire and not attain, and he felt within him the tragedy which lies in the fact that one may himself be incapable of the high deeds which he is burning to perform.

This was the tragedy of Catiline. The revolutionist of Grimstad found in it an expression of his own struggle, and with hot energy he threw himself into the subject. Without paying attention to the social problems and class politics of Catiline's revolt, he turned to the conflict within the man, and the dramatic issue became an ethical problem. As the individual arose to fight for the greatest of his dreams, old sins stepped forth as avengers, and his own past led him to destruction.

It appears that he formed the plan for this first dramatic work at Christmas time in 1848, and that the writing was completed during the first three months of 1849. We are still in possession of the first manuscript, which was also the last, for he wrote it all at white heat, putting it immediately into final form. He had to do his writing at night, and later said jestingly that "this is the unconscious reason why nearly all the action of the drama takes place at night." It was indeed a *tour de force* to write the entire play in so short a time under such conditions.

Who had taught him how to construct a drama? He had seen little of theaters, now and then a company of actors had passed through Grimstad in winter time, playing with such accommodations as they could find there. Though the performances were neither many nor great, they gave food for the creative imagination. Most of his knowledge he probably had from reading,

though that, too, was scant enough. Many years later, when he was asked about his knowledge of dramatic writing, he said that at this time he had read no dramatist except Holberg and Oehlenschläger. Because of a strong similarity between some things in *Caithne* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, one might easily believe that he had learned from Shakespeare too. But Ibsen said that at this time he knew Shakespeare only by name.

Such statements should not be taken too literally, however. Ibsen was always unwilling to acknowledge the influence of others, and, because he was personally absorbed in his themes, it was not easy for him to recognize his debt to earlier writings. But he was so intense in all his reading that nothing could come his way without leaving traces, and during these years at Grimstad he read much, with greater eagerness than at any later time. Though the problem of *Caithne* sprang truly enough out of his own soul, he found the pattern for its artistic form outside himself.

It would be folly to try to point out a single work as dominating his mind while he wrote *Caithne*. Much of the influence may have come to him indirectly. We are led back even to the classical drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when in the outline plan for *Caithne* we find such a thought as this: "Struggle between love and duty—the first is victor." In fact the entire drama breathes the atmosphere created by the romanticists of revolt from Schiller and Goethe to Victor Hugo, Byron, and Weigeland.

Yet many details of structure are inspired by individual works. Even the verse form used for the most part, the five foot iambic, is that which is familiar to us in Shakespeare, Oehlenschläger, and Weigeland, and, as in Oehlenschläger, the iambus may at the

height of the tragic climax be changed into long trochaic measures. The dramatic structure of the play, with its free changes of scene, had come down from Shakespeare to Schiller and Oehlenschläger, and on the whole we may take Ibsen's word for it that Oehlenschläger was his most direct teacher. The very manner in which the characters speak in *Catiline* points to Oehlenschläger.

Nevertheless, we find influences from the works of other authors. The way in which the hero is placed between two dissimilar women reminds one of *The Death of Sinclair* by Henrik Wergeland, though Ibsen's treatment is far more dramatic, while one of the women, who carries nemesis in her very name, Furia, has suggestions of Fr. Paludan Müller's poem, "The Vestal." Furthermore, the last act, the fall of Catiline with the appearance of Sulla's ghost, has a clear prototype in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

Thus it is no independent work that Ibsen created in *Catiline*. Even that part of it which should be personally his own, namely the spiritual problem, he has by no means mastered. The characters are dolls rather than living persons. The two women who play such leading rôles finally become mere allegorical figures. Catiline himself declaims up and down, but his oration of revolt consists merely of empty words about "corruption" and "tyranny," "liberty" and "honor", and we can find nothing either grand or wild in him. The verse in a way runs smoothly enough, though it is not in any special degree exact. Quite the contrary. There is no personal style, no fresh new image. Despite the fire which burned in the poet, his drama has become altogether literary. It is a piece of apprentice work.

When *Catiline* still takes its place in the cultural history of Norway, it is for two reasons. First, it is the only literary work in

Norway which reflects the February Revolution, second, and this is more important, it stands at the entrance to the greatest dramatic literature created in Norway Ibsen himself said twenty five years afterwards "Many things with which my later writings have been concerned—contradictions between ability and desire, or between will and circumstance, the mingled tragedy and comedy of humanity and the individual—are already dimly suggested here" The drama contains much that was to become true Ibsenism, there is a sense of inner dramatic unity and, more especially, that tendency to carry the tragic action into the soul which was to characterize the new drama Nay, there is something else which returns again and again in Ibsen's dramatic construction the two opposing women who struggle for the man and thus reveal the duality within him

Ibsen did not himself immediately understand that he had now consecrated himself for life to dramatic composition He was not at all clear about his poetic calling, or sure of himself, though perhaps his self-confidence increased as he felt the satisfaction of having completed such a piece of work as *Cathine* His two most intimate friends, Duc and Schulerud, were enthusiastic about the drama when he read it to them Duc made a clean copy, and it was agreed that when Schulerud went to the capital in the fall he should take the manuscript with him and arrange for both production and printing Ibsen, not daring to put his own name to the drama, signed it Brynjolf Bjarme I do not know how he hit upon this name, though it is likely that he felt himself attracted by the romantic element in the journeys to Bjarmeland<sup>1</sup> and that he added Brynjolf for the sake of euphony

<sup>1</sup> These were known to him from *Örvæddis Saga* by Oehlenschläger



His skill in verse making proved to be a great temptation to him. Words and images would flow all too easily from his pen without being remolded and restamped within his soul. Writing had not yet become a matter of life and death to him.

After finishing *Caithness*, he again wrote controversial poems. By the spring of 1849 he had finished a dozen sonnets which were intended as a "Summons to Norwegian and Swedish Brothers" to help Denmark in the struggle for Slesvig. He was seized by the idea of Scandinavian union, which, from the Danish German war, had spread among the upper-class youth of Norway and Sweden, and here, too, he felt the need of action. He knew that the Norn

*—wants action for the thoughts you nourished,*

*And not the empty sound of mere trades*

He tried to rouse honor and faith in defense of the Danish brothers. Clearly regarding himself as a moral chastiser of his people, of the type of Welhaven, he had evidently learned from the latter's poem, *The Dawn of Norway* (*Norges Dæmring*). But Ibsen could put no power into his words. They remained dry and insipid, and the verse was pitifully poor. When Hungary was subdued in the fall of the same year, he could do no more than comfort the fallen Magyars with the thought that some time in the future their names would become a battle cry for the new youth which would "overthrow the main pillars of tyranny."

The "hurricane" of which he often spoke in his verse no longer raged so mightily in his heart, and his writing had begun to circle about more peaceful subjects. He had fallen in love with a young lady, Clara Ebbell, who belonged to the new social group he had entered, and through the fall of 1849 he wrote one poem after another about his love. She was an enthusiast for music and poetry,

she loved Beethoven and Wergeland, she wrote poetry herself, and she accepted poetry from Ibsen, but as she had no love to give him in return, he lived on his dreams about her, and his poems became filled with piquered memories

It is not peculiar to Ibsen thus to give memory an honored place in poetry. The romanticists had already noted it and sung about it, making it one of the loveliest flowers in the life of man, and Ibsen's poems from this period are literary echoes even more than had been the case with *Caulline*. Again, we meet Oehlenschläger on one page after another, besides woods and flowers from Wergeland, snatches from Welhaven, meters from Andreas Munch and S. O. Wolff, and turns of phrase from Kierkegaard. Indeed, in a poem about "The Fountain of Memory," presumably written as early as in the days when he worked on *Caulline*, even the moon and the "peacefully rolling waves" from the Ballad of Sinclair may come unexpectedly upon us. Nothing but worn out poetic garments!

It is neither the urge to act nor the will to fight that speaks to us through these poems. One seems to meet a poet who wishes only to "sweetly dream," to gather "meek flowers of memory" and to "keep them as the heart's best treasure." Thus he sang even as late as New Year, 1850. He portrayed life as though it were summarized in the words, "to wonder, to hope, to be disappointed." Yet one must not take this too seriously. In the midst of dreams and sighs, courage and hope still lived in his young heart.

At this time one of his poems, a truly "plaintive poem" about the raging autumn wind, was printed in a newspaper. Christopher Due, one of his two intimate friends, had heard the poem, and sent it to the paper for which he had recently become corres-

pondent from Grimstad, *Christiania-Posten*. Here it was printed on September 28, 1849, over the signature of Brynjolf Bjarme. Due has said that Ibsen turned pale when he first saw it, and that afterwards he flushed with joy. Ibsen himself, in the poem, "Building Plans," written some years later, has told what a thrill the incident gave him:

*I remember, as clearly as if it were last night,  
The evening my first poem appeared in black and white,  
I sat there in my den with the smoke clouds rolling free,  
Sat smoking and sat dreaming in blest complacency*

*I will build me a cloud castle Two wings shall shape it forth,  
A great one and a small one It shall shine across the North  
The greater shall shelter a singer immortal  
The smaller to a maiden shall open its portal*

Both dreams remained alive in him despite his disappointment in his first love. Not so many months had passed before he carried a new young lady in his heart, and new ideas for poems shot up within him. Just in the days when his little poem had been published, while he was still waiting in suspense for a message from Ole Schulerud as to whether the Christiania Theater would play *Casimir*, and while he was still writing elegiac verses on the Hungarian revolution, he turned from the poetry of revolt and threw himself into that of national romanticism.

In the middle of October, 1849, we hear that he has almost completed the first act of a drama about Olav Trygvason, evidently meant to be a companion piece to *Haakon Jarl* by Oehenschlager. At about the same time he wrote a short one act play which he called *The Normans*, giving a picture from the period

of conflict between heathenism and Christianity among the Norwegian vikings, and this, too, was inspired by Oehlenschläger. Toward the close of the year he made an outline for a "national historic novelette" in the manner of the Norwegian romanticist, Mauritz Hansen. It was to deal with the peasant insurrectionist, Christian Lofthuus, and was entitled *The Prisoner at Agershuus*. Finally he took to putting legends and tales of Telemark into verse for well-known folk tunes, following here the precedent of Welhaven and others.<sup>2</sup>

He was so filled with all these new plans that at New Year, 1850, he undertook to write a rallying poem "To Norway's Skalds," with a program for national poetry—a counterpart to the poem Weigelund had sent out twenty years earlier.

*Why long ye, O poets, for the past and its distance  
Enshrining the old in its memories moldy?*

*With beauteous forms the present is teeming,  
From summer and winter, from valley and height,  
Ah, see how among us the treasure is gleaming,  
A national poetry, richly bedight*

It was these dreams that filled his last months at Grimstad. The impulse which at this time forged its way ahead in Norwegian intellectual life—the urge to express in poetry and art whatever of dreams and hidden talents lived in the Norwegian people—stirred the young Ibsen too. If he had formerly wished to be a poet-chieftain of revolt and battle, he now felt within him the call to become a national poet of the people.

I wonder if he had not heard legends of Telemark from Svein Mountaineer  
—H. K.

The same change is visible in his painting, with which he still experimented. If he had formerly used his pencil and brush for caricatures, he now became a national romantic painter. He later wrote the year, 1849, on a little painting of a pilot who sits gazing thoughtfully out to sea. There is in this painting the same spirit as in the poetic program which he constructed.

This abrupt change can be explained only by the fact that Ibsen still did not stand firmly on his own ground. I do not know how often, in the poetry from his days in Grimstad, we hear of a "hollow booming." Even in his own verse there is too much of this "hollow boom." The words are uniformly much stronger than the life within. He lived on strange forms, but only because he was not yet sure of himself. He sought, and he experimented, but he still continued to serve Pharaoh in a strange land. He himself felt the misery of it.



A FILIO SITTING BELOW THE BEACON AT CRIMSTAD  
*Further by Hsueh-tung in the Hsueh Museum*



THE APOTHECARY'S SHOP IN CRIMSTAD WHERE IBSEN  
 WROTE *CHIEF* NOW AN IBSEN MUSEUM



## Chapter Five

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### EARLY YEARS IN CHRISTIANIA

“**B**RYNJOLF BJARME’S” first poem was printed in September, 1849, and in February, 1850, his second, a memorial poem to Oehlenschläger in imitation of the old Norse *Luksmal*, a form which Oehlenschläger himself had liked, appeared in *Christiana Posten*. It is doubtful whether these two poems among so many others attracted particular attention, but people who followed closely the output of literature must at least have noticed the new author when, soon after, he published *Caïn*.

Ole Schulerud, arriving in the capital in September, 1849, met with but little success in his attempt to introduce the new drama by an unknown author. Late in December he received an answer from the Christiania Theater: the management considered the play well written, but would not produce it. Schulerud had too firm a faith in his friend to be daunted by such a refusal. Writing to Ibsen, he declared that in reality it was no defeat at all. Ibsen agreed with this view. *Caïn* was to be but a “forerunner,” breaking the path for the many dramatic compositions that were to follow.

Trying now to get the drama printed, Schulerud went from one publisher to another, but without success. The only one who would consent to take it demanded money to meet the expenses of printing and would not give any royalty. Schulerud, whose faithful and courageous heart was not depressed by this second



defeat, described the circumstances to Ibsen as really fortunate, for he would now print the book at his own expense, and they would share the profits. In his fair picture of the future, Schulerud was to continue as publisher, while Ibsen was to write two or three dramas a year, and soon they would be rich enough for a long period of foreign travel.

As it turned out, Schulerud was publisher of only one play, *Caithne*, but he has at least the honor of being the first person to bring a drama by Ibsen into print. *Caithne* appeared in the book sellers' stalls on April 12, 1850.

One would have expected the book to attract attention, for dramas of this kind were rare in the country. The new Norway, which was determined to create an independent literature, had not yet been able to foster a native drama. Although the capital had had a permanent theater since 1827, this had subsisted chiefly on foreign plays. Of serious contemporary plays in Norwegian there existed hardly more than a dozen, and Henrik Wergeland was the only dramatist worth mentioning. Since the publication of his *The Venetians* (*Venetianerne*) in 1843, not a single new drama had appeared in print. *Caithne* was therefore an event in Norwegian literature.

This fact was pointed out by the man who wrote the first review of the book, a criticism which did not come before the public, but which addressed itself to the most interested group among the young people of Norway, the University students. It appeared in the organ of the Students' Association (*Samfundsbladet*) as early as April 13, and was read to the Association that evening. There can be no doubt that the review was written by a certain editor of *Samfundsbladet*, a young man who was more eagerly on the look

out for all that was new in the world of literature than anyone else in his time, and who was soon to play a part in Ibsen's life. This man was Paul Botten Hansen. In this instance he rejoiced in finding a writer who in no way catered to public taste, but who tried to win friends only by "true and sincere poetry" which gave promise of "a certain Shakespearean power and earnestness." While Botten Hansen noted flaws in verse and weakness in dramatic structure, he gave more attention to the genuine tragic spirit evident in the fact that *Catiline's* downfall resulted from an inner psychological conflict. In this beginning he found great promise for the future of the dramatist.

More than a month later, the first and only review in the public press appeared in *Christiania Posten* for May 16. The reviewer here was, I believe, the classical philologist, Headmaster F. L. Vibe, and we are not surprised to find that in his opinion *Catiline* departed too much from the historic truth. It was a more serious stricture that the critic could with justice point out "an occasionally conspicuous extravagance of pathos" which was somewhat reminiscent of J. H. Wessel's well known travesty, *Love Without Stockings*. On the other hand the reviewer had also words of praise to offer. "The author has an unusual ability to rise to tragic height and power, as well as an unusual ability to represent the passions in their full intensity, and his diction has a degree of purity which is rare." Concluding, he laid the tragedy aside "with satisfaction," as "revealing unmistakable talents."

Much later, in October, 1850, the play was reviewed in the leading Norwegian periodical of the time, *Norsk Tidsskrift for Videnskab og Literatur* (*Norwegian Review of Science and Literature*). Again the reviewer was a classical philologist, Carl Mül

ler, and he was even more ungracious than the first one had been. With satiric sharpness he laid bare the plot of the drama and could thus easily expose inconsistencies in the characterization intended by the author. It was only in the form of the drama he saw a clever touch which promised that Brynjolf Bjarme might some day "offer something more perfect."

To this review the editor, Professor M. J. Monrad, added a few words which placed the hope for Ibsen's future on an altogether different basis. While it seemed to him that the author had poor command of form, he felt it to be more important that the drama was borne by an idea and that this idea was "both clear and beautiful" the conflict between "the individual's dim longing for liberation" and the lack of purity in his soul. He believed that an author who possessed ideas would ultimately find the necessary form to express them.

One must say, therefore, that Brynjolf Bjarme was treated with respect by the literary critics on his first appearance in the world of letters, even if the greeting was not especially warm. The students took notice of *Catiline*, but the sale of the book could not be so great as Schulerud had dreamed. Of the 250 copies sent to the bookdealers, the commissioner had 205 left the next year. The business brought no fortune to either publisher or author.

In the meantime Henrik Ibsen had come to the city. Giving up his position at the chemist's, he left Grimstad on April 15, 1850, spent some time in Skien on a last visit to his parents, and arrived in Christiania on April 29, with the intention of being examined for matriculation at the University. To get his final polishing for the examination he entered the well known Heltberg "student factory" which had then been recently founded.

At bottom, however, his interest did not lie in his matriculation studies, his mind was filled with very different things, and the new friends he made served only to draw him further away from his school work.

One of his fellow students at Heltberg's was an old bearded peasant from Telemark, A. O. Vinje, who for a long time had been an assiduous newspaper writer and who in May, 1850, took to writing verses for the radical polemic paper, *Folkets Rost* (*The People's Voice*). Another student, Frithjof Toss, likewise aspired to be a poet. At Heltberg's he may perhaps also have met the young Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who came to Christiania the same spring, though he was not admitted to the "factory" until the next fall.<sup>1</sup> He and Ibsen were but slightly acquainted in their student days. The one friend who attained some power over Ibsen at this time was Arsmund Vinje, with whose satiric spirit of revolt Ibsen felt himself akin.

Something of the same spirit he found also in the acquaintances he made outside of school. With Ole Schulerud he occupied a garret in the house of a well known woman quack doctor, Mother Sæter, in the Vilå district of Christiania, where lived also the law student Theodor Abildgaard, just then preparing to go into the new and revolutionary Labor movement. It was probably Abildgaard who introduced Ibsen to Paul Botten Hansen, in whom he found a revolutionary spirit of another kind, a spirit

<sup>1</sup> It has become a sort of tradition that all our four great authors Ibsen, Bjørnson, Vinje and Jonas Lie went to school together at Heltberg's. The fact is that only Ibsen and Vinje went together while Bjørnson and Lie went later. But Bjørnson had seen Ibsen and Vinje in school since he came to town early and waited for his class, as he puts it in his poem about old Heltberg.

The house still stands but is condemned to be demolished; it is No. 17 Vinkelgata on the corner of Filosofgangen.

inclined to look with a critical smile of contempt on every social movement

Presumably it was Abildgaard and Vinje who brought Ibsen to a meeting of protest at Klingenberg, May 29, 1850, when the European revolutionist, Harro Harring, the editor of *Folkets Rost*, had been driven from the country. This protest was a cry for freedom in which it must have been natural for Ibsen to join.

Yet he had no intention of engaging in political endeavor, the old dreams of writing engrossed his attention more and more wholly.

He presumably joined in the celebration of Norway's Independence Day the Seventeenth of May, but the next few days, being free from classes for the Whitsun holidays, he used for revising his little one act play, *The Normans*, which he now called *The Warrior's Barrow* (*Kjæmpehøien*). He sent it at once to the Christiania Theater, again using the pen name Brynjolf Bjaume. The play, which fell in with contemporary taste better than *Cathline* had done, was immediately accepted, and was staged in the fall of the year.

*The Warrior's Barrow* had none of the tragic power of *Cathline*, indeed there was no tragedy at all, and hardly even a drama, it was most nearly a poem in dramatic form, with a plot as wildly romantic and unreasonable as one could well imagine. Quite outside of all reality are these vikings who, coming to Valland, make it their all important purpose to kill an old recluse and a young girl, simply because their king once fell at the same place. Similarly unreal is the old recluse himself, who at first is quietly willing to be killed, who then relates that it was he who killed the viking king, and who still later reveals himself as that very king.

The intention of the play, to picture the struggle between heathenism and Christianity, clearly has its origin in Oehlenschläger, but it is a genuine Ibsen trait that this struggle is carried into the soul of a single man, Gandalf, the son who comes to avenge the fallen king. The trouble is that the doubt and the storm which we supposed to ravage his heart have altogether too little depth, and become hardly more than a rippling of the surface.

Ibsen once said "Whatever I have produced as a writer has had its origin in a vital feeling or situation. I have never written anything simply because I have 'found a good subject'." But when he analyzed his works one by one according to this point of view, he omitted *The Warrior's Barrow* altogether. This drama is even more than *Catiline* a piece of apprentice work, having its chief source of inspiration in books. Seeking in the play for something that might have its origin in experience, one would perhaps guess that the character of the young girl Blanka, who proclaims the message of Christianity and love to Gandalf, is borrowed from Clara Ebbell, the young lady with whom Ibsen had been in love while at Grimstad. From our knowledge of her it seems not improbable that Clara Ebbell had spoken to Ibsen about Christianity, and the character of Blanka has indeed been given the warmth and ardor of a living personality.

Ibsen had thus after all made one step forward, and had at the same time gained a mastery of form. There is still too much of the "hollow boom," but the sentiment is not so badly distorted as in *Catiline*, and those who after its presentation reviewed the drama in *Christiana Posten* and *Krydseren (The Cruiser)*, at least praised it for the beauty and music of its verse, some of which had the genuine lyric note which proceeds from a poet's heart.

Yet most of it is tinkling word music in the style of Oehlen schlager, "tones of the past" which "tremble upon the harpstrings of the soul " There is still too much of the style of Grimstad days

Ibsen took the University entrance examination in August, 1850, and could then designate himself "Student Ibsen," though in reality he never became a University student His failure in the subjects of Greek and mathematics might have been made up, but he lacked sufficient interest to go back to them, and was therefore never matriculated at the University He was, however, admitted as a member of the Students' Association since it was a mere matter of examination that held him back, and it was for this life among the students that he really cared, not for matriculation and study He gave up all thought of medicine, studied only æsthetics and literature, and played an enthusiastic part in the "literary society" organized among the students in 1849 Here he read poetry and even gave lectures At the University he attended lectures on philosophy and literature, among them the lectures of Welhaven on Ludvig Holberg in the spring of 1851 Besides this, he read and wrote verses

This procedure could not bring him any fat income From *Catiline* there was not a penny of profit—quite the contrary, and the royalty from the three performances of *The Warrior's Barrow* would not amount to much Just before Christmas, 1850, Ole Schulerud persuaded the bookdealer Steensballe, commissioner for *Catiline*, to buy the publishing rights for *The Warrior's Barrow* and *The Golden Harp* (*Guldharpen*), an epic poem by Brynjolf Bjarme, for a sum of twenty five dollars Ten dollars of this was paid down, but as the book was not printed at all, there was no further profit from the venture

Ibsen still lived with Schulerud. They had moved away from Mother Sæter and had secured a small parlor with kitchen and alcove in the house of Miss Holt in Møllergata<sup>a</sup>—much finer living quarters than those in Vika. They lived chiefly on Schulerud's monthly remittance, Schulerud being a faithful friend who willingly made sacrifices. At first they could afford to eat their dinners at Miss Holt's, and even to keep a servant who came in to wait on them. This boy made up for his occasional spree by being constantly jolly and happy, and he often invented subterfuges when his two masters were in difficulty. However, they were soon compelled to part with him and to do as well as they could by themselves. A young brother of Schulerud's who came to live with them for a time was of some service. Finding it hard enough to pay only the rent, they had to give up their dinners at Miss Holt's and indeed could not afford to eat dinner at all, a fact which no one was permitted to know, as it might have proved dangerous to both their honor and their credit. When dinner time came, they ceremoniously dressed and went out into the city, returning at such an interval of time as to make the people in the house believe that they had dined. After their return they would have coffee with bread and butter, and sometimes cheese or sausage. One time when they thus returned, it happened that the boy who served them had neither coffee nor bread on hand, the grocer having refused to give him credit. After a deep consultation Ibsen went out, and returned with two dollars. He had evidently been compelled to pawn something. At another time he fetched from the attic a supply of *Catline* which was sold to the grocer as wrapping paper.

<sup>a</sup> The house was No. 21 Møllergata just at the end of Hammersborgbakken (Hospitalsgata). The old frame building itself has now been demolished.



ever done before, holding in the summer of 1850 a great national gathering in Christiania. Things looked bad for official power and class rule, new social groups reached out their hands for the very government of the country.

It is worth noting that, although the demands of farmers and workingmen for power were at the bottom of this movement, it appeared first and foremost as a demand for freedom. Freedom in trades, freedom in commerce, freedom in the sawmill industry, these were some of the things to which the Farmers' party gave most of its attention during these years. The leader of the workingmen's uprising, Marcus Thrane, called himself a socialist, but there was little or nothing of socialism in the movement itself, the great workingmen's program of 1850 putting free trade and the abolition of internal trade restrictions first on its list of demands. The farmers wished to establish the government on a democratic basis, and the workingmen wanted the State to interfere against exploitation by capitalists, but even in these demands the thought of freedom lay uppermost—a demand for general as well as for personal liberty. It was the rising against all oppression and enslavement that roused the will to fight.

The same call to battle was heard from the great outside world. Everywhere the cry was "Freedom." The new capitalistic society, which was just at this time making its conquest all over the world, chose freedom as its battle cry, and the fifties became the very heyday of every kind of liberalism. All efforts toward progress, all faith in the future found their expression in this program. In the freedom of each individual on his own responsibility lay the salvation of man and of society.

A demand on such a basis must of course find a response in

Henrik Ibsen He had in him the same spirit of revolt, he too longed for freedom from all restraint His entire personality was rooted in his own times, and in his writing he was to penetrate deeper into the demand for freedom than any other poet in the world

If the question of freedom was important in the political and social world, he found it equally strong and still more personal in the intellectual world Even while he was in Grimstad it had forced itself on his attention through the great Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, who in the forties had instigated a burning struggle for personal liberty and for the emancipation of the human spirit Now, in Christiania, the question met him in the philosophy of Hegel, which during these years made its triumphant march through Europe and which had just now found its spokesman in Norway, the new professor of philosophy, M J Monrad This philosophy, the foremost aim of which was to make personal thought master of the world, was introduced into Scandinavia by a treatise (1824) entitled *On Human Liberty*, the author of which was the Danish poet and critic, Johan Ludvig Heiberg He became the intellectual dictator of both Norway and Denmark during the next years, more especially, as far as Norway is concerned, after the death of Henrik Wergeland in 1845 In a special degree he became the great æsthetic teacher for the generation of about 1850

Ibsen, who on an occasion about thirty years later ridiculed the manner in which all Norwegian literary criticism during those years was merely an imitation of Heiberg, was himself at this time undoubtedly a student and an ardent admirer of that author The first artistic law in Heiberg was that the poet, instead of yielding

himself to his inspiration, should, through power of intellect, make himself its master. It was a demand for self analysis and introspection which had been strong even in the romanticists, and which later in Kierkegaard became an intellectual disease. But by means of it at least the individual raised himself above everything that could bind him, and made himself mentally free. Quite certainly it was this inner freedom that more than anything else in Heiberg attracted Ibsen to him.

In his treatise, *On Human Liberty*, Heiberg, trying to show that freedom was identical with the craving which makes man human, had analyzed the question in a manner that was at the same time Hegelian—and dramatic. He had shown that the desire for freedom was of necessity a revolt against restraint, that it was born in strife and could live only in strife. This was in accordance with Hegel's principle that everything in life called out its antithesis, in which alone it really lived. Oppression was thus a necessary requisite to freedom, and thought and life became thus a continual struggle, a drama.

Ibsen, who possessed within himself a dramatic instinct, and whose thought images were naturally arrayed for conflict, met here a philosophy which explained and solved for him his own tendency. Hegel and Heiberg helped him retain the drama as the form for his self expression, and in this drama the struggle for intellectual liberty and truth was to be the dynamic force.

He himself never became a philosopher. The abstractions with which the philosophy of his times dealt lay quite outside of his mentality. No philosophical system was ever built by Ibsen, and most likely none was ever adopted by him. From the Hegel-Heiberg system he took only what suited his own temperament,

and in so doing he departed from both Hegel and Heiberg. For while they both identified themselves with a system which to them became eternal truth, and which, once adopted, allowed them to settle down as good conservative citizens, there was in Ibsen a continual revolt. It was the *struggle* for freedom which became the all important thing to him, a thought which Blanka expresses to Gandalf in *The Warrior's Barrow*

*In truth, this inner warfare of the soul,  
The light's fair conquest over realms of darkness,  
Know that this war is all of life, O pagan*

As it was primarily the warfare of the soul that mattered to him, the struggle might take various forms according to the mood he was in. The form now was in no small measure determined by two Christiania friends who for a time stood intellectually closer to him than did anyone else. One of them was Botten Hansen, a Heine worshipper, critical and ironic in his mental attitude. Though there was warmth enough in him, it was restrained, and he felt no desire to throw himself into the struggles of the world. Content with the freedom in his own mind, he rose with a smile above the conflicts of his times. Beside him stood Vinje, who found his model in the Dane, M. Goldschmidt. The latter was a warrior, but one who struck in every direction. Like him, Vinje had freed himself from party ties, having discovered that, in the struggle for a party, mind and freedom became a draft horse, slaving for the attainment of definite materialistic ends. Knowing that truth was not something finite and finished, but a thing constantly growing and changing, and that "true liberalism" consisted in seeing the justice of both sides, he had won the double vision which makes for intellectual independence. But although he thus rose

above party strife, he could not remain outside the conflict. By an inner love of battle he was driven to fight, while at the same time he carried deep within his heart an immeasurable longing for affection.

Ibsen felt himself attracted to both of these friends. His worship of liberty, being directed toward an inner freedom, had the same aristocratic touch as that of Botten Hansen. But he added to this something of Vinje's need to let the demand for freedom flash out like lightning over the heads of his fellowmen. The ethical indignation burned much more strongly in him than in Vinje, and would never let him sit still in exalted peace. Unlike Vinje he found it difficult to throw himself into the struggle, he had to send his literary creations out to fight for him. In this respect he somewhat resembled Kierkegaard, who constantly hid behind invented personalities. On the whole there was almost certainly no one in his own times to whom Ibsen was so much akin as Kierkegaard, the restless battler for intellectual truth and freedom.

It is worth remembering that this demand for intellectual emancipation was deeply rooted in romanticism. One of the strongest elements in romanticism was an attempt to penetrate to the inner life of the soul, to find and bring to light the deepest powers hidden there. Romanticism was subjectivity. Among the things which it discovered in the human soul, one of the most marked was nationalism, and that aspect of the movement which more than any other gained power in Norway was a national romanticism. By it Norwegian thought was dominated in the decade about 1850.

Welhaven, who after the death of Wergeland was indisputably the foremost of all Norwegian poets, and the one who set the

standards of the literary world, was in æsthetic theory a follower of Heiberg, and in his writing he made romanticism national. Beside him stood the great national historian, P. A. Munch, who in 1851 began to publish his work on Norwegian history and who was the leader in an impassioned search for every suggestion of national life in poetry, music, art, language, and folk tales.

No contemporary could remain entirely outside of this movement which was carried into the very heart of the Norwegian people and, therefore, into the heart of each individual. Botten-Hansen and Vinje might be as critical as they pleased, they must yet feel that here was at least something of what they longed for, and Ibsen had even earlier been impressed by national romanticism. Instead of drawing him away from this set of ideas, the new intellectual life into which he now entered served for a time to establish him more firmly in them.

In fact his most important undertaking at this time was a "national drama in four acts" with a theme from Norwegian folk legends, *The Grouse of Justedal* (*Rypen i Justedal*), dated 1850. Whether or not he finished it, we do not know, at present we have it only in a manuscript copy which ends in the middle of Act II. Reading this fragment, which is uniformly dry and uninteresting, one can easily understand why Ibsen laid it aside half finished. He cannot have been deeply engrossed by his theme. The only thing that makes the piece worth mentioning at all is the evidence it gives that Ibsen was still working on national romantic drama. Further evidence that he had no intention of departing from this form was given toward the close of 1850 when he decided to publish *The Warrior's Barrow*.

Regarding the intended subject matter of *The Golden Harp*,

which he wished to publish together with *The Warrior's Barrow*, we have no information, but we probably make no mistake in assuming that this, too, took its theme from Norwegian folk tales. At the same time he was working on another epic poem, *Helge Hundingsbane*, for which he had chosen his theme from the old heroic lays. Again there is a lack of warm personal life, the poem, in which especially Oehlenschläger's ghost stalks, is built on a borrowed model. It is too clearly evident that Ibsen is following the fashion and demand of his times, not a demand within himself.

### JOURNALISTIC WORK

**Y**ET he was in revolt

After New Year, 1851, he engaged in various kinds of literary work which brought him more decidedly before the public, and he tried more earnestly than before to rouse people's attention. To be sure, he still concealed his name when he wrote, preferring to be known as Brynjolf Bjarme, and as he had a true horror of being personally pointed out, he was entirely unknown aside from his authorship. Of his presence at the theater during the performance of *The Warrior's Barrow* he himself said "I hid in the darkest corner—it was terrible!"

The only place where he was not anonymous was in the Students' Association, where he was made editor of the Association's weekly paper at New Year, 1851, becoming the successor of Botten Hansen, probably through the influence of Botten Hansen himself. For about nine months he was editor, but it must be confessed that he was never especially enthusiastic at his task, and that he became less and less interested as time went on. In the first quarter of the year he put out three issues, in the second one, and in the third none.

Within this same period Ibsen established a sort of connection with the organ of the Labor Unions, *Arbeider Foreningernes Blad*, of which his friend, Theodor Abildgaard, became editor at the beginning of 1851. While it was Abildgaard's intention to shift



Labor politics from the revolutionary to the parliamentary field, the paper was at the extreme left wing politically, and Ibsen, in some degree identifying himself with it, did so in the consciousness that he was a radical, at war with the powers that controlled society. He was not a socialist, however, any more than Abildgaard himself, and he had no wish to be involved in the big scandal when the Labor leaders were put in prison. As there were manuscripts in his hand among the editor's papers, he was undoubtedly full of apprehension when on July 7, 1851, the police came to arrest Thrane, Abildgaard, and others. He was reassured by the news that the foreman in the printing room had been able to put all the manuscripts out of sight.

This attack upon the Labor movement terminated a bit of work which Ibsen had undertaken to do for it. Together with Abildgaard he had during the last three months been a teacher in the Sunday school at the Christiania Labor Union. At the time of the attack the school had to close "because Student Ibsen does not find it possible to carry on the instruction alone." When the school was reopened in October, Ibsen was on the point of entering a new field of work, and Vinje took his place.

The July catastrophe, however, did not cut off Ibsen's connection with the Labor paper, which during the next few months was edited by a bricklayer, Bernhard Hansen, at that time president of the Christiania Labor Union. His editorship came to an end when he also was arrested toward the close of September.

In his old age Bernhard Hansen related that Ibsen had helped him in his attempts at writing verse, and there are still a few such poems in which Ibsen seems to have had a hand. It is not unlikely that he had earlier written similar ditties for Abildgaard. Ibsen

himself said later that he had written only "insignificant things" for the paper. Though no work of his can be pointed out with certainty, there was perhaps prose as well as verse, and he is probably responsible for some of the political cartoons published. At least the supposition would harmonize well with what we know of his work on the third paper with which he was associated during this period of his life.

It is this third paper which gives us most information about Ibsen in the year 1851. With Botten Hansen and Vinje he entered an agreement to edit a literary and political free lance paper, patterned after *Korsaren* (*The Corsair*), which Goldschmidt published in Denmark. Presumably it was Botten Hansen who initiated the venture, and it was mainly he who did the editing. Vinje also devoted himself largely to the paper, while Ibsen in all of the first three months wrote little else than a few lyric poems. From an announcement of the paper we see that it advertised poems by "Brynjolf Bjarme." The intention was that he should also write dramatic criticisms, having been given a free seat at the theater after the presentation of *The Warrior's Barrow*, but at this task he did not really get started before April. Later he was drawn into politics as well, and in the months from May to August he wrote many political articles.

The editors were anonymous, and to begin with even the paper itself had no name. In place of a title there was a drawing of a man who looked satirically out upon the world about him, and the paper was called simply *The Man*. Only after running for a full half year was it properly christened with the name *Andhrumner*, and then it did not maintain its existence for more than three months longer. Altogether the paper reached only thirty nine issues and

never had as many as a hundred subscribers. It became impossible to make ends meet, and the printer would give little assistance to a paper which was at odds with everybody. It is this printer whom Ibsen has later drawn for us in the character of Aslaksen in *The League of Youth*.

Under these circumstances *The Man* cannot have left any deep impression on its contemporaries, but it is nevertheless a remarkable paper. It introduced something new into Norwegian journal



DRAWING BY IBSEN IN *THE MAN*

ism, and in it we meet both Ibsen and Vinje during a period of intellectual ferment.

Aspiring to be independent of all parties, both literary and political, *The Man* wanted freedom to strike to all sides, and its first and foremost weapon was satire. Botten Hansen turned a heavy attack upon the unsound national romanticism by writing two parodies designed to show what was truly national and romantic. The first, in a sort of Heine style, was a novelette entitled *Norwegian Mysteries*, for which Ibsen drew illustrations, and the second was a play in three acts, *The Fairy Bridal*. The latter had a number of amusing verses and turns of thought, and the

friends, among themselves at least, found much pleasure in it. It left traces on Ibsen's work, from *Love's Comedy* to *Peer Gynt*.

In politics, even more than in literature, *The Man* was a controversial paper. After the opening of the Storting in February, almost every issue contained satiric notices of what went on there. The paper turned against all parties, but especially attacked the "democrats" who now, under the leadership of A. B. Stabell, deserted the program of freedom on which they had been elected. Through this attack *The Man* took on a strongly radical color. More important, however, than any party strife was the bitter judgment it passed upon all who contented themselves with fair words for which they would not vouch in action.

I do not think that the particular measures before the Storting—marine problems, the management of the silver works, cottage legislation, etc., could elicit any warm interest from Ibsen. When he wrote of these matters at all, he was impelled by something quite different. Driven by his demand for responsibility, for agreement between life and doctrine, he became hotly indignant when the majority in the Storting proved too timid to put into practice their own policies. The very first of his political writings, therefore, were slashing satires upon the leader of the deserters, A. B. Stabell. He attacked him in prose, he attacked him in drawings, he even composed a drama about him and Ueland and other "opposition" members—a piece of writing in which certain epigrammatic verses remind one of the master hand later shown in *Peer Gynt*. There is, for instance, this couplet put into the mouth of Ueland as he is closing a speech for freedom:

*This principle from childhood up was ever in my mind,  
To watch the time and keep myself a horse's length behind.*

Ibsen's anger was intensified by his feeling of natural sympathy with the poor and common folk who longed for freedom, but were deceived by the politicians. Therefore he mocked savagely those who insisted on securing for people "freedom" to be fleeced by money lenders, and he ridiculed the bold warriors who beat down the workingmen's movement. When Swedish papers attacked the Norwegian struggle for independence, he found delight in showing that they but served "the mouldy Swedish aristocracy which still manages to cling to its existence in the midst of enlightenment and liberalism, as a ridiculous anachronism from the utter darkness of the Middle Ages." His sympathy was never with those in power. From a maker of local satiric rhymes in Grimstad, Ibsen had now grown into "State Satirist," and we find in *The Man* one of the strongest elements of his personality. Here at last he is seriously himself.

There is less of himself in the dramatic criticism which he was at the same time writing for *The Man* and the Students' Association weekly. Here more than elsewhere he is the disciple of J. L. Heiberg, whose teaching is clearly evident both when he explains the ideal intention of a student comedy and when he demands harmony between text and music in the opera. Yet here, too, there is something that leads us in to the real Ibsen. When he reviews a frivolous French drama, his ethical sense is roused to indignation by "something French in the moral tone" which he finds there, and we feel how he involuntarily unites art and ethics when he points out that such presentations must "wound the ethical and consequently also the æsthetic sensibilities of many people."

Another thought enters when in the same connection he points

out that such dramas must also "weaken the element of nationalism." Yet when the Christiania Theater a month later assumed a national rôle by presenting the musical drama, *The Home of the Fairy* by P. A. Jensen, no one was more merciless toward it than Ibsen, for he found nothing national in it except superficial finery—no national spirit. No, he says, "the national writer is he who can impart to his work that underlying tone which comes to us from sea and mountain, shore and valley, and above all from our own soul."

He himself at this time wrote both drama and poetry, and in the drama he, too, tried to be national, but we feel that he was not satisfied with the national tone which he achieved, as he let both *The Warrior's Barrow* and *The Grouse of Jastedal* remain unfinished. It was the tone from within that was lacking.

Failing here, he tried to express this tone in lyric poetry, again making a hard struggle to find himself. He gave up entirely the poetry of sentiment with which he had experimented in Grimstad, poetry which without any marked personal character had given expression to common feelings of sorrow. Instead he wished now to create what he himself called "poetry of ideas."

It once happened that Welhaven in his lectures on Holberg let fall an uncomplimentary remark about the poor taste of the "mythological" poems of the Danish poet, Paludan Müller, and said that it was impossible to continue using the old myths in this way. Ibsen promptly appeared with a rejoinder in *The Man*, maintaining that mythological subject matter lent itself well to the poetry of ideas, for "in mythology is revealed the original content of the folk consciousness in a combination of speculation and history." He believed that in such poetry both

the people and the poet would find themselves, and a few weeks later he published in *The Man* a poem which constituted his declaration of poetic faith. This poem, "Musicians," he was twenty years later to place first in his collection, giving it then a wholly new significance. In its first form the intention was to show that

*A power unkenmed belongs  
Unto the strings he touches  
And to the Neck's deep songs*

But this power took quite another turn than that which the musician himself expected. He did not win his sweetheart, but he did catch the deep national tone in his music.

*Into a magic dreaming  
My inmost self I played,  
And in my heart forever  
The Neck's deep songs have stayed*

We have from this period some poems of ideas by Ibsen which, while they do not find their imagery in the myths, show clearly how the poet longed for the liberation of his talent, and how difficult he felt the attainment to be. Both "Bird and Birdcatcher" and "The Eider Duck" show how completely he sometimes lost hope of ever finding the necessary power for free and happy self-expression. Even more than in any other poem or any other line from this period his thought is revealed in "The Miner."

The imagery here was not new, being well known to the romanticists. But what new content it received from Ibsen! In order to measure the difference in emotional quality it is worth while to make a comparison between this poem and one by

Novalis which Oehlenschläger had translated for his collection of 1803

In Novalis-Oehlenschläger we have a miner who finds himself happy in "the darkness of the mine", for everlasting fire glows around him, so that he may read in the mountain all that nature has to tell him

*Its inmost secret chamber*

*Is opened at his word*

Ibsen has replaced this light iambic with heavy trochees and spondees, and his poem has a sound of everlasting, tired, sledge hammer strokes His miner is anything but "the glad king of the earth", he aspires and labors and struggles, he wants to work his way out to "life's unending riddle," but he can find neither sun nor light His prayer is

*Heavy hammer, burst as bidden,*

*To the heart nook of the hidden*

But he cannot get through He cries

*Hammer blow on hammer blow*

*Till the lamp of life is low,*

*Not a ray of hope's forewarning,*

*Not a glimmer of the morning*

There is a strange blending of will and discouragement in this poem, and it is exactly this mood that we must imagine for Ibsen during his winter in Christiania He was seeking, and he thought he saw a goal, yet everything was so dark before him that he despaired of reaching it

At this time he wrote a poem about "Dreams of Youth" which he sent to his old "Stella," Clara Ebbell, repeating in many long stanzas what he had said to his sister in Skien, that when he had



attained the highest clarity he wished to die. Now he could formulate his thought after the philosophy of Hegel and Heiberg, and he called the flower happy if it might wither at the moment of its opening

*For then is past the lifetime of its spring,*

*Free has it won from early fettering*

*Within the search for freedom is the story*

*That is the heart of life's triumphant glory*

His own soul yearned so strongly for the liberation of thoughts and powers that he could not see any reason for living when the struggle should be ended. And yet he felt it a deep torment that the struggle promised to be endless. Of this inner conflict was born the first of his poetry that possessed vital power—because it arose out of a soul in strife.

Botten Hansen has told us that Ibsen was at this time preparing a collection of poetry for print, but as he continued working on it he discarded one after another of his earlier poems until there was not enough left for a volume. When, finally, twenty years later, he made a small collection, he did not think a single one of his Grimstad poems worth including, but of the poems which he had written during this year in Christiania there were at least five that he could still use, though he had to revise them more or less completely. This indicates that after all he had come somewhat closer to finding himself. He was really becoming Henrik Ibsen.

### THEATRICAL WORK IN BERGEN

THE pen name Brynjolf Bjarme appeared for the last time as signature to the ballad about Helge Hundingsbane in *Andhrimner* for July, 1851. By this time the name Henr Ibsen had already made its first appearance with two songs for the Scandinavian Students' Convention in Christiania in June of the same year. These were graceful, firmly wrought verses, quite worthy of their place beside those which came from the older men, Welhaven, Andreas Munch, and Jørgen Moe, and many people turned their attention to the name of the new poet. Here was a voice from the nature of Norway and from old Norwegian history, giving promise of a new national poet.

In the realm of national literature Ibsen was just at this time given a prominent place. In September of the same year the fiery souled, ardently patriotic Ole Bull came to Christiania to strike a blow for the Norwegian theater which he had established in Bergen the previous year. But the Storting refused to give the financial support that he asked for his undertaking, and *Andhrimner* devoted its final issue to ridiculing such smallness of spirit. Botten Hansen acted as spokesman for the editors of the paper, and at the same time Vinje published a poem to Ole Bull in *Morgenbladet*. It was he who introduced Ibsen to Bull, and Bull immediately conceived the idea of attaching the new dramatist to his theater.

Ibsen accepted the offer. All the newspaper work in which he had been engaged was finished at the end of September. *Andhrimner* had been compelled to close, Ibsen himself had resigned his editorial position in the Students' Association, and even the last connection with the Labor Unions' organ was severed when the paper came under a new management. As all of this work had been done without pay, it should not in any case have bound him, and the offer from Ole Bull, giving promise of a sure income and hope of future achievement, must naturally attract him. Before the end of October, Bull returned to Bergen accompanied by Ibsen, and on November 6 Ibsen signed a contract to "assist the theater as dramatic author" at a salary of twenty specie dollars<sup>1</sup> a month during the half year that the theater was open.

His work for the theater had in a way already begun with the writing of a long prologue for the concert given by the Students' Association on October 15 for the benefit of the Bergen theater. When that theater responded on November 17 with an evening performance for the benefit of the Students' Association building fund, he wrote another prologue, and soon after a third for the first anniversary celebration of the theater on January 2, 1852. If he could not immediately produce a drama, he was at least willing to put to use his ability to write verse, and he furthermore undertook to defend the theater against the hostile criticism which a certain university graduate, Paul Stub, published in the Bergen papers (November and December, 1851).

<sup>1</sup> A specie dollar of the old currency was equal to four crowns in modern Norwegian coin or \$1.08 in American money.

Despite these services the management of the theater found it expensive to keep an author without steady work. Wishing to put him to more practical service, they gave him, in February, 1852, 200 specie dollars for a trip abroad at the close of the season. He was to study the theaters of Denmark and Germany, and was pledged to act on his return as stage manager and instructor at the Bergen theater for five years at a yearly salary of 300 specie dollars.

In this way Ibsen made his first trip abroad. A foreign critic once said that Ibsen's going from Bergen to Copenhagen corresponded to a journey from Abdera to Athens. Had this been true, "the Northern Athens" should have given him some impetus to growth, but the truth is that Copenhagen could offer little that was new to him. With Danish intellectual life he was intimately allied before. Whatever he learned that was new he found chiefly in Germany.

He set out from Bergen on April 15 accompanied by two of the most talented young actors at the new theater, Johannes and Lovise Brun, whose studies he was to direct. As they were all going to Copenhagen first, they took the steamer to Hamburg and went on from there to the Danish capital, whence Ibsen sent his first report back to the manager of the theater on April 25.

He was kindly received both by the author, J. L. Heiberg, who was chief of the Royal Theater, and by its stage manager, Th. Overskou. He was given free admission to the Theater, where Overskou helped him in his study of mechanical appliances and of whatever else belonged to stagecraft. "A small,

close mouthed Norwegian with wide-awake eyes," Overskou called him in a letter, and we may be sure that he made use of his eyes

One would have expected the meeting with J L Heiberg to be something of an event in Ibsen's life, but he had little contact with the distinguished man. He was invited to dinner at Heiberg's once, just as he was about to leave Copenhagen. It was a very formal dinner, and Ibsen thought it a very great honor, but he was surprised that after dinner Heiberg did not speak of literature or politics, but rather of "questions of culinary interest." He got nothing out of the meeting.

The most important thing about his stay in Copenhagen was the fact that he saw good theatrical art. Though most of it was undoubtedly in the academic idealistic style with which he was familiar in Christiania, he also met indications of a new realism and became deeply interested in a new drama by C Hostrup, *Master and Disciple*, in which a romantic national theme was used in attacking the truth-evading press.

In the beginning of June he set out from Copenhagen to Dresden, this time alone. A month earlier a German theater magazine had carried a small notice saying that "Student H Ibsen" had been given a scholarship by the theater in Bergen, for travel and study. His name had thus made its first appearance in Germany, but had been immediately forgotten, and it was as a total stranger that he arrived in Dresden. Here his great countryman, the famous painter, Professor J C Dahl, took him in charge and secured permission for him to study the equipment and machinery at the Court Opera. What impressed

him even more than the opera was the great art which he saw in the royal gallery of paintings, where a new and rich world of beauty opened to him

Yet it was not these things so much as a new book which came into his hands, that gave fresh impetus to the ferment within him. This book was the little pamphlet *Das moderne Drama*, recently published by the great German literary scholar, Hermann Hettner, then still a young man of only thirty years. The essay professed to be "*ästhetische Untersuchungen*," but was in truth a challenge and an admonition to young German playwrights to take their work seriously. Hettner discussed one by one the chief forms of the drama: the historical tragedy, the domestic drama, and the comedy, sternly demanding that all of them should follow a high literary standard. He refused to recognize any historical tragedy except that which was also psychological tragedy of character. The historical subject must of necessity involve a struggle between opposite powers which we of this age might feel in our own hearts. In reality, then, there was no difference between historical drama and present-day drama except in the age and society from which they took their themes. In both, the slogan was away with chance, intrigue, with everything that marred the great dramatic conflict. Chance and intrigue might be given a place in comedy, though even there it was necessary to show dramatic conflict and character. Hettner's aim was to encourage true dramatic composition.

While Ibsen was in Dresden nothing else held his interest as did this declaration of a program by Hettner. He read and studied it, and it later seemed to him that he had been in the city for four months, though in reality it was less than two, so

rich was the summer to him because of this one book, in whose strong idealistic demands he recognized his own spirit. In *Catiline* he had attempted to create a historical tragedy upon the same principles, a drama in which catastrophe should come as the inevitable consequence of choice and guilt. Ibsen was aflame with the desire to create such a psychological drama as Hettner described, and in a sense he already carried it within him. But in experience he had not yet grown up to it. The realities of life had still not struck their claws deeply enough into him, and he had not yet freed himself sufficiently from literary patterns and the influence of others to express himself completely and without reservation in his writing. Life had to wound his soul till it bled before his writing could proceed from bitter need, from an inner strife which demanded dramatic expression.

Nevertheless, Hettner's book helped to keep alive in him the spirit of revolt, and he went home from Dresden setting a higher standard for himself and feeling dissatisfied because he was unable to fulfill the new demand.

The intention was that Ibsen should stay for a while in Berlin and Hamburg as well, but the scholarship proved too small, and he returned to Bergen toward the close of July to enter upon his new work.

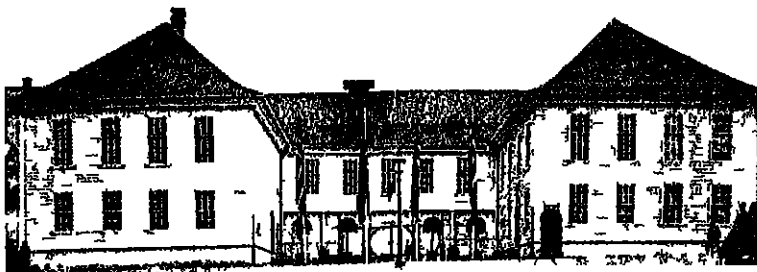
As Ibsen was never given a position of authority at the theater in Bergen, it is clear that one cannot judge his artistic taste by the dramas presented there. He could, of course, recommend new plays, and now and then he made use of the privilege, but his suggestions were certainly sometimes rejected. The repertoire was determined by the theater manager with the assistance of the "artistic director" or "inspector," a man who was in fact in

structor also, as he went through the parts with the actors and taught them technique. The man who held this position, a university graduate, Herman Laading, had begun his work in October, 1851, just before Ibsen's arrival in Bergen. He was most directly above Ibsen in authority, and it was with him that the new stage manager was set to work.

The distinction between their duties was not quite clear. Ibsen, too, was responsible for some of the instruction, and had to be present at rehearsals to correct the speech of the actors and to assist in the stage directions, particularly by marking for each actor his places for entrance and exit and his position while on the stage. Sometimes there was disagreement between the two instructors. Laading, being a man of literary training, and fifteen years older than Ibsen, insisted on his power to control, and as he was violently quick tempered he probably flared up at Ibsen on more than one occasion. Ibsen, too, sensitive, self-conscious, and easily wounded, became angry when anyone touched him too nearly. We are told that once, in a fit of temper, he challenged Laading to a duel, a contest in which he would have fared badly, as Laading was both a skillful swordsman and an excellent pistol shot. Nothing came of the affair, as the directors of the theater succeeded in reconciling the parties, who went on working together as before. There is no doubt that Ibsen suffered in being thus under the command of another.

Although he was called instructor, he was more nearly a stage manager, acting as intermediary for the directors to see that actors and other employees fulfilled their duties and, more especially, taking charge of the costumes and decorations. He performed all this work conscientiously, and though poorly





THE OLD THEATER IN BERGEN WHERE IBSEN  
WAS MANAGER, NOW A THEATRICAL MUSEUM



ENTRANCE TO THE APARTMENT WHERE IBSEN  
LIVED IN THE OLD THEATER IN BERGEN



sued for the economic calculations that he had to make, he kept his books with remarkable neatness. From the first season, 1852-53, we have still one of these books. Its clear handwriting and a score of small drawings of decorations and stage settings give evidence of how seriously he took his work. He undoubtedly learned theater technique from the bottom during this period. "Those years in Bergen were indeed my apprenticeship," he wrote to Laadig in 1875.

Silent and solitary he went about his work. With nothing imposing in his bearing he "pattered," as they said in the theater, about behind the wings, wrapped in a wide, somewhat threadbare gown or cloak, pale of face, and with tightly closed lips. He seldom spoke more than he had to, and no one spoke to him. Not even Lucie Johannesen (later Fru Wolf) dared to approach him, fearless and flippant though she was, but in her flippant way she made a remark that showed what awe he unconsciously inspired. "See how he creeps into his cloak," she said, "and see how it swells out in every direction. He is pregnant with great thoughts, and they almost burst his cloak, wanting to get out into the world."

He was shy when he had to correct or give instructions to the actors, especially if they were women. The criticisms themselves showed a delicate sense for what was true and genuine. He was displeased if anyone took liberties with the text, and watched closely to see that every word remained unchanged and that every direction of the author was followed to the last detail. Yet he was usually silent at the rehearsals.

Soon after he had begun his work it happened that a young woman, who had just left the stage because she married, met him

on the street and said in her broadest Bergen dialect "Well, Student Ibsen, so you are teaching Johannes and Lovise and the others how to act May God help you, brother—and good luck!"

Ibsen smiled a trifle sadly and answered "Yes, good lady, I need God's help, for I am myself but learning But do not tell the others, perhaps they will not notice it"

Despite this hope, he knew that they noticed it, and was afraid to say much

To a new actress he whispered "Did you hear how badly that speech was given? Did you see how that gesture was untrue and unnecessary?"

"But, Herr Ibsen," she replied, "why don't you tell her so?"

"Well, you might say it, Miss Jensen," was all his answer

On the whole, Ibsen spent much time alone during his life in Bergen, especially the first three or four years To begin with he lived at Madam Helene Sontum's hotel on the custom house square Later, beginning May, 1853, he rented two rooms in a house beside the theater, though he still took his dinners at Madam Sontum's where he became almost as a son in the house, establishing a friendship that lasted all his life He was invited out to other homes also, among them some of the best homes in town, and he was generally well liked for his neat appearance and courteous manner But he was reluctant to accept invitations and was not easily drawn from his shell

During all this time in Bergen he did not find a single friend with whom he felt any intellectual kinship Sometimes the strain within him was so great that he had to speak out to someone, and at such times he cried that he was lonely—that he always

would be lonely—that no one in the world cared for him, and no one believed in him

"I found myself at that time," he wrote in 1875, "in a condition of ferment which did not permit me to affiliate openly and fully with anyone" Fighting with himself, he began to feel at war with the world about him At times he broke out into wild anger at the bonds of duty and convention which fettered him, but most of the time he submitted and went silently his way As well as he could, he adapted himself to good society in Bergen, feeling often positively afraid that he was not sufficiently well mannered

Uncertain and defenseless in the strange city, he felt a constant concern lest he should be an object for ridicule The spirited lady who afterwards became his mother in law, Fru Magdalene Thoresen, remarked that when he first came to Bergen he resembled "a small, shy woodchuck," and she found something "amusing" in his effort to be on a level with the fine folks He dressed much more elaborately than necessary, wearing shirt frills and lace cuffs, and even sporting yellow kid gloves on the street

In some degree this may have meant, as the old proverb says, that he "wore silk for very poverty", for his finery was usually old and out of date He was poor His twenty five dollars a month could not support him properly, and new debts were added to those he already had before he came to Bergen This fact was among the things that troubled him during these years, but he concealed his worries as much as possible and, not wishing anyone to know the state of his affairs, tried to adhere to the customs of the social circle in which he was placed

Similarly, he felt that in his work he was under restraint, but submitted to being bound hand and foot, for although there arose in him by and by a powerful desire to strike out for himself, he had not yet strength to make the break. Furthermore, he often persuaded himself that he was serving his own ends in the work that he did, and so long as the struggle for freedom had not become a flaming fire within his own being he continued to submit.

The theater in Bergen was dedicated to one purpose—that of building up a native dramatic art in Norway. While the Christiania theater might employ a Norwegian actor now and then, Danes were generally dominant there, and when a Dane, Carl Borgaard, in 1851 became manager of the theater, its character grew even more strongly Danish than it was before. Against this Danish management all the enthusiasts who arrayed themselves under the leadership of Henrik Wergeland were in open warfare. Yet many, even of those who had high hopes for the national romantic movement, regarded it as natural that the language of the stage should be ultra Danish, and saw nothing paradoxical in the fact that “national” Norwegian folk dramas, such as *At the Sæter* or *The Home of the Fairy* should be presented by Danish actors. The Norwegian theater in Bergen was a national protest against such Danish domination in Norway.

While in Christiania Ibsen had shown no disposition toward such a protest. Rather he had been inclined to scoff at it. The thing of chief importance to him was artistic truth, a dramatic art which should give a complete illusion of real life. In his opinion the Christiania public placed its requirements of art so low that the cry for a “national” theater was a mere exhibition of

folly The effect of such a theater would be to lower the standards of drama, while in his thought the word national should be intimately bound up with the elevation of art

At the same time Ibsen longed for a theater which might present Norwegian productions in such a way that the acting should be in full harmony with the spirit of the drama, and when Ole Bull broached his plan for the Norwegian theater in Bergen, Ibsen was kindled by the enthusiasm of the founder When one of the students in the literary society dealt somewhat harshly with the management and acting there, Ibsen made a rejoinder far more bitter than was customary within this friendly group "His face spoke the unmistakable language of anger," said one of those who had been present

Immediately after this he went to Bergen with Ole Bull, to assist in the work of the new theater There were both difficulties and disappointments Bull, uncertain though he was in the matter of detail, had still a strong central aim he wanted a theater which should not only use Norwegian actors, but be strongly Norwegian in every way It was his misfortune that those who managed his theater for him did not understand this purpose Herman Laading, the artistic director, held old æsthetic views, he trained the actors to declaim, not to speak naturally, a method with which Ibsen would certainly quarrel Moreover, in Laading's system, the actors spoke book language to the very letter, conforming as exactly as possible to Danish spelling We do hear that two or three times in the first five or six years a rôle was played in the local vernacular, for instance, Johannes Brun once used a Norwegian peasant dialect in Holberg's *Jeppe of the Hill* But there was no plan in this procedure The "Nor

wegian" part of the theater consisted merely in the accent and tone quality of the speech, everything else was Danish

Nor was it easy to build a genuine Norwegian theater First among many difficulties was the fact that there were no Norwegian dramas to present Among playwrights Holberg came closest to being Norwegian Nothing truly Norwegian could proceed from such things as *The Home of the Fairy* which Ibsen had to assist in producing, contemptuous of it though he was The productions that held sway at the theater in Bergen as well as in Christiania were Danish vaudevilles by Heiberg or others, and French dramas of intrigue by Scribe or others, the latter being in Danish translation This was what Ibsen had to work with

It was, indeed, what Ibsen had set out to change He was greeted by the *Bergen Stiftstidende* for November 20, 1851, with the following note appended to a theater announcement "Herr Ibsen has been engaged as playwright, and now that he knows and appreciates our theater, we hope to have from his hand, in the course of the season, some national dramas suited to the personnel of the theater, which might give to our stage in this respect, as well as in others, its proper character "

Ibsen himself regarded it clearly as his mission to write national drama, and went at the task with a will, having laid out his own program in the prologue to the benefit concert for the Bergen theater in October, 1851 He wished to have a hand in the restoration of the old heroic times when the skald recited valiant deeds to the people, and when life and poetry were one He believed that poetry should strengthen the power of achievement in a people, for—



*As in the soundboard of a harp there lies  
A power to make its music rich and strong,  
So in its art, a people's strength will rise  
To sound with fullness and to vibrate long*

Therefore he wished to recall to the people "the rich imagery of the distant past," "the forgotten tales of childhood," "the melodies of wood and meadow," "the fair scenes of mountain and vale," all "the vivid panorama of our people's life and action "

This was the substance of that program for national romantic drama which Ibsen presented in his first theater prologue and which he repeated with slight variations in prologue after prologue in Bergen Year after year, in terms that were often too similar, he insisted that art and the people belong together, that literature must express that which lives in the nation's soul—that which attaches a people to its home It was the very spirit of the nation that he wanted to give life and substance on the stage

## Chapter Eight

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### FROM *ST JOHN'S NIGHT* TO *LADY INGER*

**I**BSEN'S first attempt to realize his own ideal of a national romantic drama was made during the trip abroad in 1852 when, with memories made more vivid by separation from home, he wrote the fairy comedy *St John's Night* (*Sankthans natten*). His intention was to show that only the innocent and confiding soul can come in touch with the secret natural powers hidden in folk lore, and so arrive at a true interpretation of life, while he who dabbles "poetically" with the question sees nothing of what stirs underneath the surface, and does not attain truth. The play is purely romantic, and is intended to be national, although the folk songs on which it is built are as much Danish and Swedish as Norwegian. It seeks to commend a true romanticism by disparaging the untrue, showing unmistakably the same tendency as *The Fairy Bridal* which Botten Hansen had written for *Andhrimmer*, and which may, in fact, have been the source of Ibsen's idea. For the rest, the sources of inspiration were Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the romantic comedy *Day of the Seven Sleepers* by J. L. Heiberg, and *Master and Disciple* by Hostrup. The play, which is a literary satire, is itself wholly literary, quite without life of its own.

It was a failure for the author. Presented as the celebration drama on the third anniversary of the founding of the theater in Bergen, January 2, 1853, it was played before a full house. The

theater had been furnished with new decorations for the festive occasion, and people waited expectantly to see if the student from Christiania "had anything to show." But the play was received with hisses and hoots instead of with applause, and three days later, when it was presented for the second time, the seats were empty. The drama had to be laid aside. Since that time it has never been staged, and Ibsen would never permit it to be printed.

Perhaps he had, even at the time of writing, something of the feeling described in his poem "In the Picture Gallery," printed in 1859. The poem, looking back to the summer days of 1852 when he walked about in the Dresden gallery and "drank enthusiasm as from a rich spring," describes him as so completely captivated by the great art about him that his own soul seemed strong and brave and "the demon of doubt within me is crushed," yet as finding that he still harbored a "demon of doubt," "an elf of darkness" which whispered that when he seemed to hear the living stream of poetry rippling within him it was but the autumn wind rustling the dry leaves. His writing was after all but the flying leaves of books, a literary echo. Though he might comfort himself with Heiberg's teaching that in art there is no question of "what" but only of "how," he felt in his own heart that this was not enough, that a personal content, an idea and an intention must fill the form if the work was to attain life. He was still but a servant to ideas and forces outside of himself.

Yet there are in *St. John's Night* some things which point forward. There is a short poem in folk song style, in which we hear the tone that later sounds rich and full in Solveig's song, and

the satiric element in the play, especially, is later recurrent in Ibsen. Julian Paulsen, the poet who parades as a nationalist, and who bedecks himself with wordy finery from the philosophy of Heiberg and Kierkegaard, saying, for instance, that "love is the yearning after love," is a caricature who is later given bone and blood in the characters of Peer Gynt and Hjalmar Ekdal. The "dæmonic" element in his personality, the romantic self-contradiction within his soul, appears as a new caricature in the divinity student, Molvig, in *The Wild Duck*. Further, the closing words about the difference between love, betrothal, and marriage, are a sort of introduction to *Love's Comedy*. In all this we see a trait which later strongly characterized Ibsen's life as author, namely, that old thoughts and images often reappear in new forms. Although he discarded *St. John's Night*, moods from it long remained in his mind, where they little by little grew back into life, and the strongest of these was his anger at whatever was untrue and unreal, a mood which proves that after all there was in *St. John's Night* something of the real Ibsen.

We may well believe that the author felt his humiliation deeply. His first attempt to give the theater a Norwegian drama had failed. No new plan rose immediately within him, and when pressed by the necessity of having a new play ready for the New Year's celebration in 1854, he could only revise the little one-act play which had been presented at the Christiania theater in 1850, *The Warrior's Barrow*.

The revision itself is interesting, for he rewrote the entire play. The plot remained as before, equally romantic and unreasonable, but of the old verses and dialogue hardly a line was retained. The chief purpose of the revision was to carry the

struggle between paganism and Christianity more deeply into the life of the individual and so make the drama more psychological. Also, the loud lyric tone of the play was subdued. Of Oehlenschläger we no longer see many traces, his dominance over Ibsen was past. Writing was now a matter of finding, not the most high-sounding words, but those which deeply and intimately expressed the emotional life. Thus the drama answered better than before the demands both of dramatic art and of the younger romanticism.

The production proved to be a new defeat. In Oslo the play had at least been given three performances, in Bergen it was played only this once, if we except a single performance two years later. To compensate partly for this failure, the drama appeared as a serial in a city newspaper, *Bergenske Blad*, and was thus the second of Ibsen's plays to appear in print. No one took any notice of the piece, it was quite lost among contemporary productions.

It is not unlikely that Ibsen had a personal reason for returning to *The Warrior's Barrow*. I have already suggested that Blanka, the heroine of the play, may have had her prototype in the lady whom Ibsen had been ardently in love with during his last year in Grimstad. In 1853, when he again let his fancy play about Blanka, "the visionary," there was a new love in his life, born in spring and lasting throughout the summer months. This time

*She is a child of the meadows free  
A child of but sixteen summers*

The young girl, whose name was Rikke Holst (she had been christened Henrikke), was in fact no more than fifteen and a

Nordnes, one of Rikke's girl friends acting as guard, and Ibsen feeling happy though somewhat afraid. In spite of their precautions the father discovered them. Rikke's five year old brother, later a well known journalist, once told me his recollection of the occasion, when a raised arm and a clenched fist appeared threateningly in the avenue, and his father rushed in. "He was green with rage," said Rikke later. Ibsen set out at a run, and at this the girl's love began to cool.

Thirty years later, after both were married, Ibsen revisited Bergen, and she went up to call on him.

The old warmth arose in him anew, and he asked with a sort of curious wonder "Why was it, really, that nothing came of our affair?"

Then the lady laughed gaily as in olden days. "But, my dear Ibsen, don't you remember that you ran away?"

"Yes, yes," said Ibsen apologetically, "face to face I was never a brave man."

It was this "rapidly formed and violently terminated love affair" that Ibsen in 1870 gave as background for the drama he wrote in 1854, *Lady Inger of Östad*.

This statement has given much trouble to Ibsen students, some of whom have attempted to show that his memory was at fault, and that he really meant a later drama, *The Feast at Solhoug*. Since Ibsen, however, mentions also this latter play in the same exposition, saying that it, too, "had a personal background," we are compelled to rely on his word in the matter, and understand him as best we can.

In *Lady Inger* there is hardly anything aside from the dream of love that can have had its origin in his fondness for Rikke.

Holst Lady Inger's daughter, Elina, who was perhaps inspired by little Rikke, dreams of a knight whom no woman can withstand, at the same time as she speaks proudly about revenge for her dishonored sister and about redress for her fatherland. When she meets the knight, although he is the man who has dishonored her sister, and although he would fain keep Norway under Danish rule, she gives herself to him in a love which knows no regret or hesitation. This can be no true picture of the gay and childish Rikke Holst, but it gives evidence that the mysterious power of love held Ibsen's mind in its spell and enabled him to describe the awakening of the emotion in a young girl's heart. Being himself unhappy, he naturally gave to this love a tragic outcome.

As a matter of fact, it is not at all necessary that there be a direct connection between the experience of love and the dramatic theme. The point is that the emotion of love awakens and excites the poetic powers. "It is the song time for the poet as for the bird," we read in a letter from Aasmund Vinje. For Ibsen, whose genius had lain almost dormant during his first years in Bergen, such an awakening was needful. As love brought new animation, poetry sprang up in him anew.

Though the relation between Elina and the knight Nils Lykke runs through all five acts of *Lady Inger of Östråt*, it seems hardly reasonable to believe that this was the thing of central importance to Ibsen when he wrote the drama, for it is not Elina, but Lady Inger, who is the heroine of the play, and he calls it an "historic drama" because it deals with the fate of Norway. The question arises of how he came to choose precisely this subject for his work.

Speculation as to how and why Norway had lost its independence was becoming a more and more heated question during the fifties. In these years as never before there was an effort to discover everything that bound together the old Norway and the new history, folk songs, fairy tales, legend, language, and music, and as scholarship bridged the gap between medieval and modern times it became clear that the nation had maintained its identity during the dark intervening centuries. Why had it then succumbed to foreign domination? A few years later the answer to this question became the main interest in the life work of J. E. Sars, a young man from Bergen who entered the University in 1853. The question was of profound significance to the entire people, it concerned nothing less than the vital power of the nation in the past and for the future.

In seeking for an answer, thought must turn to the decisive period at the close of the Middle Ages, in which two men stood out as the last great chieftains in the struggle for Norwegian independence, the two knights, Knut Alvsson (treacherously murdered in 1502) and Herlog Hudfat (executed in 1508). Ibsen had let these two appear in "The Dream at Akershus," his poem of 1851, and had almost certainly read Andreas Munch's recent account of the murder of Knut Alvsson, *An Evening at Akershus Castle* (1849). "With a quiet shudder" Ibsen returned to these old stories, a "golden harvest of memory" which was recalled to him by Haakonshallen in Bergen as they had been by Akershus in Oslo, and which naturally led him to consider the relation between national greatness and decline. In the spring of 1854 he had occasion to visit the third of the ancient Norwegian capitals, Nidaros, as the Bergen actors gave theatrical perform-



ances there for a month. It was probably during this visit that his interest began to be occupied with the well known noble lady, Ingerd Ottessedotter of Austrått.

P. A. Munch, referring to her in the history text book which he published in 1838, said that she might have, and indeed should have, led the struggle for Norwegian independence, and, in 1854, a Danish historical work, the second part of *The Count's Feud* by C. Paludan Müller, recorded how Lady Ingerd had at least once attempted a revolt. Paludan Müller's account from Norway dealt especially with the efforts of Vincentius Lunge and the last Norwegian archbishop, Olav Engelbriktsson, who had both tried, each in his turn, to uphold Norway. But it was a prelude to this struggle that Lady Ingerd and the archbishop, in 1527, had attempted to support the uprising started in Sweden by Peder Chancellor and "the Dalecarlian squire" who pretended to be the son of Sten Sture.

Other Danish writings of the spring and summer of 1854 made more vivid than ever before the period of Norway's downfall, from 1520 to 1540, and the great national problems were thus again made burning issues. It was in these that Ibsen found an incentive for writing, and it was to the last struggle for Norwegian independence that he gave the form of drama.

He was compelled, as he himself has told us, to steep himself in the history of medieval Norway, particularly in the latter part of it. "I tried as well as I could to enter into the life and customs of those times, into the emotional life of the people, and into their way of thinking and expressing themselves." Something of value for his purpose he found in the books which I have named, as well as in one or two new document collections, but his main

source of information for the drama itself must have been the documents about the Dalecarlian squire in Norway, which Gr F Lundh had printed in the first volume of the first Norwegian historical periodical, *Magazine for the Language and History of the Norwegian People*, 1833

Commentators on the relation between the content of Ibsen's drama and historic truth have credited what later research has brought to light about Lady Ingerd of Austrått, matter which gives no evidence that she possessed ability for national leadership. In the documents which Ibsen had before him the case appeared different. There the spirit of revolt was stronger in Lady Ingerd, and he involuntarily transferred to her some part of the nobly conceived vision of the future which Andreas Munch in 1849 had attributed to the widow of Knut Alvsson, a connection which is clear when we find that the dream of being "a king's mother" came to Herr Knut's widow as well as to Lady Ingerd.

On the whole, a present day historic view cannot find much of genuine national thought in Norway of the sixteenth century, and almost nothing of national resistance to Danish rule. But it is natural that an author writing at a time when the young Norway first arose against the power of Danish tradition should reflect some of his own enthusiasm for Norway back into the period of decadence, and should lay the blame chiefly on Danish action. It was this tendency that was brought out in the preliminary announcement of *Lady Inger*, which Ibsen permitted the theater management to publish in the Bergen papers. In it we are told that the play "deals with that period in the history of our country, during which the Danes were putting the last

touches on the work of oppression—" Such a statement reveals the spirit from which the play proceeded

Twenty years later, after the flare up of an earnest controversy about the Danish period and its relation to the present, an historical scholar like Ludvig Daae, who did not wish to break the line leading from Danish culture, regarded *Lady Inger of Östrat* most nearly as an encouragement to chauvinism, and when Ibsen in 1873 was about to prepare a new edition of his work, Daae wrote to him that it behooved him as a Norwegian author to think twice before he again presented to the public so untrue an interpretation of the period, for the very reason that the understanding of this period in history had power to determine, in large measure, questions of contemporary importance Ibsen might as well have laid aside the entire drama as to submit to such a protest It was a part of his very nature as dramatist that he felt the contest about Danish rule more deeply and vitally than a purely historical scholar could approve, and it is therefore less strange if he attributed to Lady Ingerd greater national ambitions than she actually harbored

He perceived clearly, at any rate, that action did not correspond to will, and found in this fact the very soul of tragedy

In a remarkable degree, Ibsen here goes back to *Catiline* Though I do not know that he had already discarded this first effort of his youth, it seems natural to think so, since he obviously borrowed from it Especially is this evident in the relation between Nils Lykke and the two sisters Elina and Lucia, which has a clear counterpart in the relation between Catiline and the vestal Furia and her sister Both Nils Lykke and Catiline have

seduced one of the sisters and driven her to her death, in both cases the other sister, harboring feelings of hatred and revenge for the seducer, but not knowing his name, unwittingly comes to love him. Less intentional is the fact that *Lady Inger*, even more than *Caithne*, became a night piece, all five acts taking place in a single night. The deepest similarity, after all, lies in the contradiction between ability and desire, between will and hope, which Ibsen found to be the underlying theme of *Caithne* and which was there given the form of two women who contend for the hero. Here, in the new play, the struggle is carried into the very soul of Lady Inger.

While it seems evident that Ibsen had adopted something from the diseased will of Shakespeare's Hamlet, there is also something personal in the drama. Ibsen, too, feeling himself called to great deeds, is conscious of doubt.

Lady Inger had sworn over the dead body of Knut Alvsson that she would devote her life to revenge and to a struggle for her country's freedom. "I felt God's strength in me, and me thought, as many have thought since, that the Lord himself had set his mark on me and chosen me to fight in the forefront for my country's cause." But instead of taking up the struggle, she was consumed by doubt. "Woe, woe unto him who, having been given a great mission in life, has not the power to accomplish it. We are told that a woman shall forsake her father and mother and follow her husband, but she who is chosen to be the instrument of heaven dares not own anything that is dear to her—neither mate nor child, neither kindred nor home, and therein, you see, lies the curse of being chosen for glorious deeds." Lady

Inger could not live for her calling, she had to love, and she bore children. When Herlog Hudfat started a revolt, and there was springtime and hope in the land, she had no part in it. "I stood doubting—far from the strife—in my lonely castle. At times it seemed as though the Lord God himself were calling me, but then would come the killing dread again to benumb my will. 'Who will win?'—that was the question that was ever ringing in my ears."

These are indeed words which have sprung directly from thoughts and feelings that had tortured Ibsen himself. This is the most deeply personal thing in the entire play, and in making it the basis of drama, Ibsen created a psychological tragedy of character, of the sort demanded by Hermann Hettner. Here was a great historic struggle involving the problem of a people's fate through a long future, and the conflict was carried deep into the life of the individual, becoming a struggle between the most precious personal and the highest national interests. It was grand tragedy.

Ibsen lessened its grandeur, however, when by entangling the tragedy with a piece of intrigue he sinned against one of the other chief demands laid down by Hettner. The fact may be explained by his attraction to the dramatic art of Scribe, and especially to one drama which left its traces too deeply on *Lady Inger of Östrat*, namely *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre*, an historic drama of 1850, presented at the theater in Bergen in October, 1854.

One must admit that this play of Scribe's has something more of historic spirit than his other dramas, and the thing that just at this time attracted Ibsen to it, was that it has also something

of a national tendency, being built about the theme of French national honor as personified in the knightly king, Francis I. The events of the drama take place, strangely enough, at almost exactly the same time as the events in *Lady Inger*. Here as else where, the thing of chief importance to Scribe was the intrigue. To him all drama was a game of chess, and in this very play he symbolized the dramatic conflict in such a game between Emperor Charles V and the king's sister, Marguerite. Similarly Lady Inger remarks "I am playing tonight for the whole of Norway's land," and Nils Lykke compares the struggle with a game of cards. Other tricks of the intrigue, such as letters which are exchanged or fall into the wrong hands, Ibsen has learned, one after another, from Scribe. It is especially clear that the two meetings in which Nils Lykke, attempting to ferret a secret out of a stranger, pretends to know everything already, are copied from *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre*, and the thing which finally gives Nils Lykke the upper hand, the fact that he senses the secret love affair of Lady Inger, is borrowed from another historic play of intrigue by Scribe, *Le Verre d'Eau* (1840), where it is in exactly this manner that Lord Bolingbroke has the advantage over the Duchess of Mailborough.

All this struggle of intrigue leads to the thing that Hettner had warned against, the concealment of the great dramatic issue. The outcome, instead of proceeding wholly from within, depends on who is most clever at tricks.

Yet there is a great difference between *Lady Inger* and the dramas of Scribe, for while Scribe builds an historic comedy in which the intrigue is everything and the characters nothing, we meet in Ibsen a serious struggle involving deep antitheses, and

for the first time Ibsen succeeds in drawing living characters, real men and women stand one against the other and in the struggle unfold their very souls

He had good reason, therefore, to be proud of his work "My best play," he called *Lady Inger* in 1857, and though I fear that he was somewhat proud even of that which we like least—the clever tangle of intrigue—he did not at any later time fall into the same technique in plot construction. He never returned to Scribe after proving here his skill in tying a dramatic knot. In this proof of skill, *Lady Inger* is a piece of apprentice work. Later, when Ibsen was master of his art, his own dramatic genius taught him to build his dramas on stronger, clearer lines.

After the humiliation he had suffered with his first two plays in Bergen, Ibsen felt little confidence in this new venture. The president of the board of directors of the theater, the merchant Peter Blytt, says that one day in the fall of 1854 Ibsen came to his home with a thick package of manuscript under his arm, seeming even more worried and strained than usual. He managed to state, however, that this time he had been unable to produce a new drama for the anniversary celebration, but that a friend in Oslo, who wished to remain anonymous, had sent him a play. He dared not venture an opinion on the drama, but wished the president to read it through and see if it was worth sending on to the management. This was *Lady Inger of Östråt*. Blytt became enthusiastic as he read it, and the drama was immediately accepted, but he was deeply puzzled as to its authorship, until it happened at one of the last rehearsals that Ibsen came tearing angrily out upon the stage from the wings, interrupted the play, snatched the prompter's copy, and demon

strated to one of the actors how a long passage must be read. As soon as his anger subsided, he apologized and "pattered" out again, but Blytt had noticed that he read the passage from memory. Ibsen was caught and forced to admit his authorship, but still he refused to have his name appear on the bill.

Thus *Lady Inger* became the anniversary play on January 2, 1855, the best actors in the theater carrying its main roles. But again the author met with defeat. The play failed to hold the audience, and could be presented only twice. Then Ibsen laid it aside, not even attempting to have it printed.



## Chapter Nine

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### BALLAD DRAMA

AT bottom Ibsen believed in his play, and, knowing in his own mind that he had made very considerable progress, he found courage for new effort. Furthermore, his intimate study of the early history of Norway had been something of a revelation to him, and he was impelled to acquire a closer knowledge of the age.

He could not much longer, however, concern himself with the period from which he had taken *Lady Inger*. "This period," he wrote later, "is not especially attractive to dwell on at great length, nor does it provide much material that lends itself to dramatic treatment." It was really meager in subject matter. Forced to find other sources, he turned now to the days of the old saga, reading first the Sagas of the Norwegian Kings and presumably the volumes which had then appeared of *The History of the Norwegian Nation* by P. A. Munch (the third volume, which carried the history as far as the second half of the twelfth century, was published in 1855). But he found nothing here that held his attention or that in his mind took on the form of drama. "Rather," he said later, "I found in the Icelandic family saga a rich supply of what I needed as human form for the moods, images, and thoughts which at that time filled, or at least more or less clearly hovered about in my mind."

It gives a remarkable proof of the un national spirit of educa

tion and higher culture in the country at this time that a man like Henrik Ibsen could live until he was twenty-seven years old without the slightest acquaintance with the Icelandic family sagas. And his own admission that he had never even heard of these sagas before gives the best possible evidence that his inspiration for the Viking drama, *The Warrior's Barrow*, with which he had worked for several years, had come from quite another source, namely from the Danish poet, Oehlenschläger. Even now, when he discovered the Icelandic sagas, it was in a Danish translation that he read them, a four volume *Historic Tales of the Deeds of the Icelanders at Home and Abroad*, which N. M. Petersen had published in the years 1839-44, and which in fact held the first place in Norwegian saga reading down toward the close of the nineteenth century.

In this Danish version Ibsen now read the great sagas of Egil Skallagrímsson and Njál Torgeirsson, of the Eyrbyggja, Laxdæla and Vatsdæla people, of Gisle Sursson, Gunnlaug Snake's-tongue, and Grettir the Strong. The only saga style with which he was previously familiar was that of Oehlenschläger, and so Danish was his linguistic background that in his opinion the translations of N. M. Petersen, at least as far as the language was concerned, were "excellent." And one must admit that they departed widely from the language of Oehlenschläger, having retained the concise pithiness of the Norse saga style, and having sought strength in good Danish vernacular. The thing, however, that struck Ibsen most forcibly was the vital dramatic content of the sagas, the trenchant character portrayal, and the mighty contests between man and man, woman and woman.

The reading kindled drama in himself, gathering his thoughts

especially about a new woman character, whose prototype he found in Hallgerd of the *Njálssaga* and in Gudrun of the *Laxdælasaga*—the hard valkyrie with a wounded spirit, who incited men to strife and brought death to him she loved. In contrast to her Ibsen created a woman who hated strife and who was wholly meek and submissive. As a setting for these characters he imagined a noble feast during which sharp words goaded men into a quarrel which in turn grew into mortal combat. He wanted to gather into this combat the whole spirit of the ancient times.

This drama, however, was not the first one that he wrote. Various things intervened, "most of which," he said later, "were of a personal nature and presumably stronger and more decisive than the rest." What this personal element was, we unfortunately do not know. It has been suggested that his love affair with Rikke Holst attracted him to milder and more lyric moods than those for which he found expression in the sagas, but there can hardly be any doubt that by the summer of 1855, when he wrote his new play, *The Feast at Solhoug*, his affair with Rikke was already over, and though it may be true that some warmth of the old emotion still kindled a desire for poetic writing, it was at least not directly about himself and little Rikke that he wrote.

We are perhaps more inclined at present to stress a factor to which he himself gave secondary importance. "I believe," he wrote, "that it was not entirely without significance when I concerned myself at this time with a thorough study of Landstad's collection of Norwegian ballads, which had appeared a couple of years earlier." "My prevalent mood at the time," he added, "was more closely allied to the literary romanticism of the Middle Ages than to the facts of the saga, more to verse form than

to prose style, more to the element of musical language in the heroic ballad than to the element of character drawing in the epic saga ”

While we would gladly take his word for the mood of the fair summer months during which he employed the romantic style, we cannot help remembering also that this exposition was written (1883) with the definite aim of defending himself against criticism. He wished to “assert and establish that the drama in question, like all my other dramatic works, is the natural and necessary expression of my life at a certain period. It has arisen from within, and is not the result of any outward prompting or influence.” Yet some years earlier, in 1870, when he was still warm from the effort of breaking with his early writing, he had described *The Feast at Solhoug* as “a study which I no longer acknowledge.” At that time it certainly appeared to him that the drama was precisely a result of “outward prompting,” of reading and the dictates of fashion.

It was the ballad that thrust aside the family saga, and fortunately we can trace at least one of the reasons why this came about. Some time after completing *The Feast at Solhoug*, Ibsen wrote a short treatise *About the Ancient Ballad and Its Significance to the Art of Poetry*, in which he made a comparison between the ballad and the saga for dramatic use, finding that “the ballad in a much greater degree than the saga adapts itself to dramatic treatment.” He regarded the saga as “a great, cold epic, finished and closed, in its innermost nature objective and foreign to all lyricism.” He felt that he could not use the saga for dramatic purposes unless he himself put the lyricism, the emotional life into it, a procedure which made him feel as if

he disturbed the very temper of the saga. The ballad appeared altogether different. Here the lyric element was interwoven with the epic, "and the dramatist who finds his material in the ballad need not subject it to such modifications as must he who takes it from the saga."

The theoretical basis for this opinion Ibsen probably had from the treatise of the Danish author, Carsten Hauch, on the *Njalssaga* (1855), but certainly it was something personal that determined his choice in the matter of a basis for his own writing. The dramatic material which he had gathered from the sagas gave rise to drama only after he had gone into the study of the ballad. The two women characters, foster sisters, who had grown out of the sagas, followed him into the ballad drama, the viking chief who was to have stood between them became a young poet musician who had wandered far and wide, the feast which was to have opened the conflict now became the background for the entire new drama, and the wild tragedy which belonged to Viking times was subdued to a milder lyricism. This whole process of reconstruction Ibsen has explained to us, with intent to show that *The Feast at Solhoug* had grown naturally from his own experience.

It always irritated him that critics called this drama an imitation of the popular romantic drama *Svend Dyring's House* by the Danish poet, Henrik Hertz. "This critical assertion," he wrote, "is unsound and false", and he went so far as to say that there was no suggestion of influence. "Henrik Hertz has never in any considerable degree attracted me as a dramatic writer. I can therefore not understand how he would, without my knowledge, influence my own dramatic composition." He

points out the difference in language between himself and Hertz "The diction of my drama has an entirely different color note, the rhythm in mine is fanned by a light summer breeze, while over the rhythm in Hertz broods the haze of autumn "

In reality the difference in language is not very great, though Ibsen builds on Norwegian ballads and Hertz on Danish Ibsen has carried the Norwegian ballad entirely over into Danish language, even the poetic form corresponds more closely to Danish ballad style than to Norwegian, and the versification has become exactly the same as in Hertz It was not strange if people thought that he had taken Hertz as his model.

I do not believe this supposition to be correct, for in almost everything except outward form there is a deep difference between the two plays Nevertheless I think that without *Svend Dyring's House* Ibsen might not have written *The Feast at Solhoug* In his reading of the Norwegian ballads it must have struck him that one might as well build a drama on them as Hertz had built one on the Danish, and the play may thus have been written in competition or rivalry with *Svend Dyring's House*

Ibsen's subject matter is widely different from that of Hertz True enough, there is in each drama a young woman who is bewitched by mad love for a man who will have none of her, but the dramatic struggle resulting from the circumstance is altogether different in Ibsen Here the woman has married an other while she carried the love of her youth in her heart, and her love therefore becomes not only an uncontrollable power which drives her to crime but also an inner conflict which makes of the play a spiritual drama As for the lover, he has returned

her passion until he meets her younger sister who then suddenly fills all his thought and desire

There can be no doubt that the plot in this form has been influenced by Scribe's comedy, *Une Chaine*, of 1841, in which the love for a married woman binds a young musician even after he has, quite as suddenly as Ibsen's hero, been seized with love for a younger woman. But though Ibsen has again learned from Scribe, he has freed himself entirely from the technique of intrigue, and lets the dramatic contrasts stand clearly and singly against each other.

Comparing, then, the technique of Ibsen with that of *Svend Dyring's House* of 1837, one notes immediately in *The Feast at Solhoug* the progress in dramatic realism. There is no longer any witchcraft, any ghost, any chorus of angels, everything is human, everything is born of the impulse of human emotion. While no one can deny that wild, reckless love is described in Hertz with a power and dread much stronger than we find in Ibsen, this love in Hertz's drama is born of witchcraft, and the theme of the play lies in the words

*Ye know not what secret power is laid*

*In the mystic charms with which we played*

How far deeper is the content of the lines in which Ibsen states his theme, giving it a form which seems intended as a direct contrast to Hertz

*With what a magic resistless might*

*She masters us in our own despite!*

Here deep spiritual powers are brought to light, not forced by artificial means, but revealed by the dramatic impulse. The

contrast is typical of the dissimilar ways in which Hertz and Ibsen treated the ballad

It is Hertz's theme, taken from two old Danish songs, one about magic love charms and one about a mother who returns to defend her children against an evil stepmother, which more than anything else binds his drama to the ballad. Aside from this there is hardly a trace of ballad style.

Ibsen's method is just the opposite. While one can, like Margit in the play, compare the theme with that of various ballads such as the one about little Kjersti or the one about Margit Hjukse who was conjured into a mountain, the resemblance is purely symbolic, the subject itself is not taken from the ballad. Ibsen has invented his own theme, and the songs seem born of the theme.

In this connection we might notice a remarkable bit of intuition in Ibsen. From the treatise that he wrote soon after on the heroic ballads of Scandinavia it is clear that he considered them, especially the Norwegian ones, as extremely ancient—that is, as going back even to the pagan period. Yet when he was to give the ballad dramatic form, he instinctively placed it about the year 1300, the period in which, as later study has shown, ballad poetry was virtually born. Instinctively Ibsen felt the relationship between the ballad and this period which he knew only through folk legends.

The ballad surges through the entire drama, almost every line being reminiscent of some old song of one kind or another. While it is excellently done and bears witness of an intensely intimate knowledge of all ballad writing, it shows what



a danger Ibsen was laid open to It is altogether too well done It is like meeting a Proteus who transforms himself in appearance and nature Ibsen is lost We enjoy these pleasant verses on which, lulled into dreams as by an opiate, we glide far away into the ancient realm of the ballad, but the whole is after all an imitation, a trial of artistry

For this very reason it took the public by storm When it was presented as the anniversary play at the Bergen theater on January 2, 1856, Ibsen experienced his first theatrical triumph He has himself told about the performance "It was given a superb, an unusually spirited presentation, was acted with delight and abandon, and was received in the same spirit 'The Bergen lyricism' ran high in the well filled theater that night The performance closed with numerous curtain calls for the author and the actors Later in the evening the orchestra, accompanied by a large crowd, gave a serenade outside my windows I almost believe that I let myself be carried away into making a sort of speech, at least I know that I felt extremely happy" Once he even said that this was his only happy day in Bergen The encouraging effect of his success is evident in one incident which he has not related in his reminiscences, the ovation which was given him by the actors immediately after the play was over, and the reply he made to their speech of thanks "Your appreciation," he said, "shall strengthen me in my work toward the aim for which I am striving, and which"—these words he spoke with particular emphasis and power—"I *shall attain*" His indomitable will won its way forward, and he took a new grip on the ground under his feet

Six times the drama was presented in Bergen during the first

few months, an unusual occurrence in so small a city. Hardly anything except the little national music drama, *At the Sæter* by Claus Pavels Riss, had been a greater popular success. It would have provoked Ibsen heartily if he could have seen this comparison, but it may serve to remind us that his victory was not won on the basis of the best public taste.

The triumph was not limited to Bergen. Ibsen immediately sent his drama to the Christiania Theater, where it was presented on March 13 and, here too becoming popular, was given six performances during the spring. At the same time Ibsen had arranged with the national publisher in Oslo, Chr. Tonsberg, to print the play in book form. It came on the book market on March 19 as the first play he had published after *Catiline*.

With this new play, Ibsen for the first time became known beyond the boundaries of Norway. Translated into Swedish by the well known Swedish vernacular poet, F. A. Dahlgren—teacher of Gustaf Fröding—*The Feast at Solhoug* was played at the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm for the Union Day celebration on November 4, 1857. As far as I have discovered, there was but one modern Norwegian drama which had previously been played on the Swedish stage, this being again *At the Sæter* by C. P. Riss, which F. A. Dahlgren had adapted for Swedish acting, November 4, 1856. Now *The Feast at Solhoug* sailed into its wake, drawing *Lady Inger of Östråt* after it, the latter play being taken about in Sweden by a company of actors early in the sixties.

Through *The Feast at Solhoug* Ibsen, and thereby also the new Norwegian drama, was brought into Denmark as well. When the Danish actor, Vilhelm Wiehe, who had played Gud

mund at the Christiania Theater, left this theater to return to his own country in 1860, he took *The Feast at Solhoug* with him and had it presented at the Casino in Copenhagen in 1861. It proved to be many years, however, before another play of Ibsen's was performed in Copenhagen, and it was Björnson, rather than Ibsen, who paved the way for modern Norwegian dramatic art in Denmark. To Danish critics there seemed to be no reason for presenting among them *The Feast at Solhoug* after *Svend Dyring's House*.

Nor did the critics in Oslo take too kindly to the new Norwegian drama. Hartvig Lassen in *Aftenbladet* was especially severe, criticizing it as simply an imitation of Henrik Hertz. To be sure, Bjornstjerne Bjornson defended it in *Morgenbladet*, and Botten Hansen did likewise in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, praising chiefly the lyric quality in the play, but Ibsen long harbored a bitter rancor towards "the real criticism, written by the real critics."

In the book market, too, this play met with little success, and it was at least fifteen years before the first edition was sold out. As for *Lady Inger of Östråt*, the publisher did not dare to take it on, and when Ibsen still made bold to send it to the Christiania Theater, he met with refusal. The Danish manager, Borgaard, recognized that it was "poetical, rich in good characterization and powerful dramatic moments," but he wished to have certain things omitted. Since Ibsen could not agree to this, *Lady Inger* continued to be laid aside.

Thus Ibsen met with both fair weather and foul in the first year after *The Feast at Solhoug*, but at bottom he still felt, as on the great triumphal day, "exceedingly happy."

He had also to some extent emerged, just at this time, from the lonely life which he had usually led before, and something more of brightness had entered into his circumstances. Influenced by the president of the board of directors, the merchant Blytt, he had in the fall of 1855 joined a small "literary-social" club, the Society of December Twenty second, and one may judge his accession of courage by the fact that he immediately gave a lecture here. On November 27 he spoke on "Shakespeare and His Influence on Scandinavian Literature," a subject which, even though we do not know the lecture, gives sufficient evidence that Ibsen at this time studied Shakespeare and was influenced by him. Ibsen gave other lectures before the society, wrote poems for its anniversary festivals, and on the whole found enjoyment in the companionship of men who were in sympathy with his work and who had faith in his talents.

*The Feast at Solhoug* had given a new joy to his mood

*My little book is to me a flower*

*Dear indeed to my very heart*

he wrote in some verses to a lady to whom he sent the play. He felt that his writing, like the flowers, needed "light and sunshine" for the attainment of its true life. And now the sunlight had come. For a time, at least, it must have seemed to him that he had found the proper sphere for his poetic genius, and his intention was to continue building dramas on the folk ballad.

It proved true, however, as Björnson had said, that the triumph could not be repeated. In *The Feast at Solhoug* the ballad had been so perfectly carried over into dramatic form that further progress in that direction was not possible. Even if Ibsen under

stood clearly that he must use the ballad in a different way next time, the attempt failed, as it must inevitably do

In 1856 he wrote the new ballad drama, *Olaf Läljekrans*, choosing a theme that lay much farther from *Svend Dyring's House* than *The Feast at Solhoug* had done, but in reality following much more closely the method of Hertz This time the subject itself was taken from the ballad of Olaf Läljekrans, but the ballad melody no longer ran through the entire drama Olaf Läljekrans in the song was a knight whom the elves charmed out of his right mind, so that he forgot his affianced bride and perished in his trance Wishing now as before to make everything human, Ibsen changed the elf maiden who seduced the knight into that Alfild of whom in 1850 he had wished to write a play In thus making her "the Grouse of Justedal" Ibsen combined legend and ballad, but did not succeed in properly merging them There is in the drama a peculiar shifting between dream and reality, a contrast even worse than that in *St John's Night*, because it has no corresponding motive Further, he tried to give the theme background in a family feud after the manner of the saga, and even included a little intrigue of deceptions and misunderstandings, altogether making the play the least artistic thing that Ibsen has written Even the language shifts from saga style to ballad form or to modern realism The last act is an almost parodic mixture

Yet it is from this act that we remember at least six lines which half a century later fell into the hands of Thorvald Lammers and were given life in his song "Sorrow like Silver" They are verses which strike some of the deepest notes found anywhere in Ibsen's writings

*The pleasures of life are like autumn hay  
And sorrow like silver that glitters away*

Despite such fine single images, the play was a hopeless failure. Before its presentation at the next annual festival of the theater, January 2, 1857, people fought in their eagerness for a place at the ticket window, and every seat was sold by noon, so expectantly did the public await a new *Feast at Solhoug*. But the play fell helplessly to the ground and was laid aside after two performances. Ibsen himself put it away without trying to have it printed.

In the fall of the same year Olaf Skavlan wrote the gay parody *The Feast at Mare Hill* (*Gildet paa Mærrahaug*), bringing to a close all imitative writing in ballad style, from Henrik Hertz to Henrik Ibsen. National romanticism died in caricature.

### SUSANNAH THORESEN AND *THE VIKINGS*

WITH *The Feast at Solhoug* Ibsen had stepped into the front rank among Norwegian playwrights as the first of a new generation of writers to become famous in Norway, and the play itself proved to be a final contribution to that national romantic movement in which the age since 1840 had labored so diligently

In his personal life the drama marked a change at least equally great, by winning for him the strong spirited woman who was to be his companion to the end of his life

On the happy evening when *The Feast at Solhoug* made its brilliant success, Fru Magdalene Thoresen walked home from the theater with her husband, the worthy pastor of the Cross Church in Bergen. Having done some translating as well as some writing of original plays for the theater, she had often had occasion to speak to Ibsen on theatrical matters, but had never thought it worth her while to invite the young instructor to the parsonage, where so many of the best national minded men of Bergen met. On this evening she expressed to her husband a wish to invite the new playwright to her home for an evening, and he immediately gave his good natured assent.

Five days later, January 7, 1856, Ibsen was for the first time a guest in the Thoresen home. After tea in the evening he found

himself chatting with one of the young ladies of the family, Susannah Thoresen, a daughter of the pastor's first marriage. She was then a little past nineteen years old, a fresh and fearless girl, tremendously interested in the theater, and she won the author's heart instantly by telling him how she had been attracted, the previous year, by a play which few others liked, *Lady Inger of Östråt*. As she was speaking of this, the words somehow burst out of Ibsen: "Now, Miss, you are Elina, but there is in you the making of Lady Inger!"

Neither of them forgot these words. More than twenty years later, when the book was first published in German, he presented it to Susannah as a Christmas present with the inscription:

*You, indeed, rightfully own this book,*

*Who in spirit descend from the Östråt folk*

Ibsen was immediately struck by a quality of great mindedness, a chieftain spirit in the girl. Her playmates could have testified to the strong and manly stuff of which she was made. In their theater games in childhood they often used plays of their own making, in which Susannah always wished to take men's roles. Among these was a highly romantic play called *The Brigands*, with Susannah as a brigand chief. They played it so realistically that blood flowed, and one of the boys began to cry, but Susannah said: "If I have the honor of wearing a beard, I will not cry either!" And she bore her wound without a whimper. She loved whatever was great and brave, and she wished that she herself might take a part in glorious deeds.

Ibsen was aflame with love from the very first meeting, and before the end of January sent her a written offer of marriage, a poem entitled "To the Only One" (*Til Den Eneste*). She



seemed to him the only woman he had met who took life seriously In her eyes he read of "dreaming thoughts" and

*A heart that longs and throbs upwards  
And finds in this world no peace*

Therefore he called to her

*Dared I but rede thee, thou riddle  
Of youth and deep dreamings wrought  
Dared I but choose thee boldly  
To be the bride of my thought,  
Dared I but plunge my spirit  
Deep in thy spirit's tide,  
Dared I but gaze on the visions  
In thy innocent soul that hide,*

*Ah, then what fair songs upspringing  
Should soar from my breast on high,  
Ah, then how free I'd go sailing  
Like a bird toward the coasts of the sky!  
Ah, then should my scattered visions  
To one single harmony throng,  
For all of life's fairest visions  
Would mirror themselves in my song*

Ibsen came in person to receive his answer, attired in his very best for the momentous occasion, and was shown into the parlor to wait for Susannah But time went on, and no Susannah came Ibsen walked up and down the room, sat down and stood up, more and more perplexed and hopeless At last, in despair, he made for the door Then all at once he heard a girl's ringing laughter, and a gay curly head emerged from under the sofa

It was Susannah, and the room was instantly filled with joy, for Ibsen was accepted and became engaged

"Only after I was married," he wrote in 1870, "did my life attain a more serious content " But there can be no doubt that this influence began as soon as he was engaged to Susannah Thoresen "She is," he wrote later, "exactly such a character as I need—illogical, but with a strong poetic instinct, large minded in her way of thinking, and almost violent in her hatred of all petty considerations " These are certainly characteristics that would appear more importantly when marriage had brought the two into intimate companionship, but there was in Susannah Thoresen a strength that could not but make an impression on Ibsen's life as soon as they had bound themselves to each other

Many years later, in 1894, when Magdalene Thoresen celebrated her seventy fifth birthday in Oslo, she said in her response to Ibsen's speech "It was easy for you, Ibsen While we others had to work and study for years on whatever we would take from the sagas, you had Susannah, the living spring from whom you could take everything "

"You are right," replied Ibsen

Susannah Thoresen's true realm was in the sagas and in what ever possessed their spirit During her childhood she lived in the sure conviction that she would some day become queen of Iceland She read sagas and fairy tales to her younger brothers and sisters, she felt at home in the heroic life

It is not unlikely that she was the one to lead Ibsen back from the ballads to the sagas again and who was therefore responsible for the cropping out of the saga style in *Olaf Liljekrans* Also, her own temperament may be partly recognized in the char

acter of Ingeborg, who brings her lover into feverish anxiety by letting him wait for her final answer, but who afterwards manages both the elopement and the marriage. At least it is certain, according to Ibsen's own testimony, that it is she who appears in the proud women with saga names, Hiordis in *The Vikings* and Svanhild in *Love's Comedy*. She is the valkyrie who fights through life at his side.

Half in teasing, Ibsen gave her the pet name, "my cat." He used this name in many little verses to her, which she kept and referred to as "cat poems." When in 1871 he published a collection of verse, she asked him if he had included any of the cat poems. He asked her to see for herself, adding that one of the titles, if read backwards, would reveal a cat poem. Thus she read for the first time the poem "Thanks" (*Tak*), which he had just then written in acknowledgement of what she had given him.

*Half hers are the glancing  
Creations that throng  
With pageant and dancing  
The ways of my song*

It was neither sagacious thinking nor a sure literary taste that made her such a helper in his work. It was her temperament, her strength of will, the involuntary poetry in her, that inspired and supported him. She might well have borne the surname of the saga queen "Storraade."

Daily companionship with a young woman of this caliber would naturally strike fire from a poet's soul. As she made demands on Ibsen, his demands on himself grew stronger. All his emotional life took on a richer movement, and he tried to break

away from the environment to which he had so long been bound, and to find a new basis for both writing and action

Early in 1857 he wrote a treatise on the heroic ballad which was designed to give the theoretical background for his recent dramas. In this he condemned the Old Norse sagas for dramatic use on the ground that they were void of all lyricism. He did not forget that Oehlenschläger, using saga subjects for drama, had for his purpose invested them with a lyric quality, but this seemed to him to "distort the meaning of the original material in the eyes of the beholder." The saga lost something by it.

On the second of February he had given his lecture on the ballad before the Society of December Twenty-second, and on April 17 he sent his finished treatise to Botten Hansen. Yet in a letter of April 28 he writes "I have already in hand a new dramatic work, which will in content and tone be quite different from my earlier ones." The remarkable thing is that this new play was precisely a saga drama which burst the bonds of the theory he had just stated. It was this play that grew into *The Vikings at Helgeland*.

It had become clear to him in the intervening time that the old sagas had enough of lyricism, of surging life and vigor, to make them well suited to dramatic form, that they possessed not merely "abstract, plastic beauty of form," but that they were at least equally much "a painting, with color, light, and shade." Undoubtedly it was Susannah Thoresen, the embodiment of saga womanhood, warm and strong at the same time, who made him see all this, and who enabled him to write the drama which had dimly arisen in his thought when he first read the old sagas—the drama of the courageous woman who instigated strife, even

to the point of death, for the man she loved Thus Hjordis was created, a nature much wilder and deeper than that of the proud Margit in *The Feast at Solhoug*

At first he was not able to break entirely away from his theory His treatise on the ballad had pointed out that the poetry of the saga was "mainly pagan," that it was Christianity which brought lyricism and romance into literature and created the dramatic ballad poetry, and that therefore the saga subjects might be "far better suited to treatment in the ancient Greek style," as the Greek tragedy was also pagan But discovering before long that no deep similarity existed between Greek and Norse paganism, he suddenly threw overboard the verse form which he had first tried, and wrote his play in prose The saga style was necessary to the saga drama

It has been suggested that Björnson's one act play *Between the Battles* influenced Ibsen to adopt a prose style, but the fallacy of this supposition is proved by the fact that Björnson's play did not come to Ibsen's notice before he had finished *The Vikings*

One finds also, upon closer examination, that there is a great and fundamental difference in style between the two plays Björnson's intention was not to write saga style at all, but to employ a living, spoken language which bore some faint trace of the saga tone only because it was descended from Old Norse In fact he later regretted that he had not written his play in the pure Norwegian vernacular, and of *The Vikings* he remarked as soon as he had read it "But it will not do to speak saga language in our day Language must take hold at the point of its latest present development, and if possible make some forward

progress, but it must not settle outside of our country, in the middle of the great sea, on as many islands as there are kinds of material—here the ballad language, there the saga language, there again the language of transition ”

Ibsen's procedure had been quite different from Björnson's "In *The Feast at Solhoug*," wrote Björnson in the letter quoted above, "he built on the ballad until at last he seemed to me a living ballad, until he had verily absorbed its language. Then he leapt over into the saga, from which he now emerges with its expressions, its language word for word, its slightest turns of style, and all its ready made poetic content " Björnson was forced to recognize and praise the skill with which it was done, yet he could not but "snort with anger" because such art was imitation, virtuoso playing "Thus, I think, do the gods in Valhall speak!" cried the German poet, Paul Heyse, in warm enthusiasm when he had seen *The Vikings*. But the language of gods hardly formed the most suitable dialogue in a drama of human beings

To our ears the Ibsen saga language does not sound so genuine as it did to an audience of two generations ago. We now demand an altogether different Norwegian tone. While we can point out all the words and turns of phrase which Ibsen had borrowed from the sagas, we also see too clearly that they had not come to him *directly* from the sagas, but through Danish translation. Therefore it is not the saga style itself that we meet, but the saga style which was in use in the middle of the first half of the nineteenth century, a style confined to a definite period from which the development of the Norwegian language has carried us farther and farther away.

Consequently, when the drama is played at the present time,

too much of it becomes mere declamation. It is conceivable that the powerful tragic genius of Laura Gundersen could at one time give life to *Hiordis*, but the drama loses its hold on us more and more, chiefly for the reason that it is inspired by reading rather than by life. Again, Ibsen has not written fully and freely out of his own spiritual need, but has let himself drift with the tide of his times. Since those times demanded that he should be national, he felt himself to be in league with them when he grasped at new national subjects. Both he and his contemporaries still thought it enough that he gave a reflection of the past. He did not fulfill the demand of Hermann Hettner that the historic drama should support a conflict of vital interest also to the present day, or, to be more nearly accurate, he permitted the psychological problem which he had taken from the old sagas to lie too deeply buried under the historic forms. He tried too earnestly to retain the old national style.

The main theme of his drama was taken from the Volsung Saga. In giving it an historic framework he showed the same remarkable intuitive power which had been evident in *The Feast at Solhoug*. In direct contradiction to the historic theory of the day, in which he himself believed, he had instinctively placed *The Feast* in that period to which later research has assigned the birth of the ballad. Similarly, while all contemporary learning placed the Volsung legends away off in prehistoric times, Ibsen drew the legendary theme down to the historic Viking period, in which more recent study has given it a rightful place. Feeling instinctively this relationship of his theme to the later sagas, he afterwards said truly that the Icelandic family sagas formed the chief background for his writing. With perfect

justice, therefore, he transforms legendary giants and valkyries to historic characters, and furthermore finds room in his drama for the struggle which he wished to describe in *The Warrior's Barrow*, the conflict between heathenism and Christianity. This time it is carried deeper into the personality and underlies rather than expresses itself in the action. Only at the very last, in the hour of death, Sigurd reveals the fact that he is a Christian.

It is a remarkable coincidence that just at the time when Ibsen was beginning his framework for *The Vikings at Helgeland*, Björnson was working on *Lame Hulda*, remarkable not so much for the fact that both dramas breathe the spirit of the old sagas—which was only too natural, given the intellectual tastes of the day—as for the fact that both authors built their dramas about the words of Gudrun in the *Laxdæla Saga*. "To him whom I most loved, I was most unkind."

It may not be a matter of mere accident. Ibsen has told us that *The Vikings* had its beginning in *The Feast at Solhoug* in which there is something of the same theme, and it seems probable that *Lame Hulda*, too, has a special relation to this earlier play. Björnson's theme, that of a man who, seized by a new love, still feels bound by the old, has a far greater similarity to *The Feast at Solhoug* than has the new Ibsen drama, and Björnson has chosen to deal with the same period as does *The Feast at Solhoug*, almost as if he intended to show us, in contrast to the lyric ballad style of Ibsen, a proper psychological drama of that period. I believe that *The Feast at Solhoug* was partly instrumental in making Björnson write *Lame Hulda*.

The very probability of a common origin gives a reason for noticing the difference between *Lame Hulda* and *The Vikings*.



I am not now thinking primarily of what has caught the attention of many others, namely that Bjórnsen shifted to verse, Ibsen to prose. For Bjórnsen, who, whether he wrote in verse or in prose, strove to use the current language rather than an imitation of the old saga style, this marks no deep cleavage. It is rather in spiritual portrayal that the two dramatists differ. Though Bjórnsen has permitted the inner life of his characters to find expression in ways suited to their historical period, his concern is with problems that are quite universal. The drama may be clumsily built and lacking in the quality of suspense, but it deals with live persons, and it shows the psychological results of the double impulse in the man's love, and of the morbidity of repressed love in the woman. Everything is human. In Ibsen, on the other hand, everything, or almost everything, mental life as well as action, has an historic source, and is brought into the drama from the sagas. Hjódis, like Lame Hulda, kills herself and her lover, but the background for her action lies in a temperament and emotional life which is lifted out of the human. She is a witch, she belongs to the cavalcade of evil spirits, *Aasgaardsreien*. Similarly, the many things which may seem unreasonable in the behavior of other characters, such as Sigurd, Gunnar, and Örnulf, can be explained only by reference to what is told in the sagas. In short, the literary background is stronger than the author's insight into human nature.

Yet the dramatic impulse of the work has been given an exposition in which there is something genuinely Ibsenesque, and which despite all elements of imitation shows that the play had a deep hold in Ibsen's spiritual and dramatic development.

Besides Brynhild in the Volsung Saga, two other women,

Gudrun in the *Laxdæla Saga* and Hallgerd in the *Njálssaga*, have provided him with material for his *Hjórdís*. It was these two that helped him make a human being out of the valkyrie Brynhild. From Gudrun he borrowed single traits and striking words, though for the rest she was, as in Hans E. Kinck's interpretation of her, hardly more than "the lovely female for whom Eros is all, and in whose nature there is not a vestige of the valkyrie," and whose character, furthermore, was so completely finished in the Icelandic saga that there was hardly anything further to do with her.

The psychological problem in Hallgerd was much greater. Kinck places her among the first of "the personalities which the saga did not understand," regarding her as the great proof of "the saga's failure to penetrate into feminine psychology." And with the poet's insight he perceived that with just such characters "there is a field for saga imitators in modern literature." Kinck has tried to give a psychological explanation of Hallgerd, and Ibsen before him struggled hard in his attempt to explain this enigmatic woman in whom are strangely commingled grandeur and pettiness—in whom, according to the old saga, dwelt memories of Sigurd Fafnirbane and Brynhild. Kinck's conclusion is that Hallgerd was neither driven to her misdeeds by a low tendency to thieving, as the saga has it, nor led by mere blind eroticism, as was Gudrun, but that there burned in her soul a longing for partnership with a great minded man, something which to a woman of her nature must be the great adventure of life, or, to borrow an Ibsen word, "the miracle."

Something of the same spirit has been caught by Ibsen in his *Hjórdís*, who longs to follow Sigurd "not in dalliance," but "to

to its tragic conclusion Ibsen had thus, after all, put something of his own soul into the saga play

Various as is the material from many sagas which Ibsen has brought together in *The Vikings*, we may yet feel puzzled by the incident which he has introduced from the Egilssaga Örnulf sitting down to sing Egil's own poem, "The Son Burial" But there is something in the incident which arose directly out of Ibsen's own soul Egil's singing himself free of sorrow, regaining his life through song, appealed to Ibsen He felt that writing should be a struggle for freedom from whatever threatened to weigh the spirit down, but at the same time he knew that his own writing had not yet attained to this

A few months after he had written *The Vikings*, he said in a letter to a friend "I have fervently longed, and almost prayed for a great sorrow which might fill out my existence and give content to my life" The previous year he had written the few lines of *Olaf Lofjekrans* which still live "Sorrow like silver, that glitters alway" He recognized clearly that his writing lacked the right power because he had not yet come to grips with life, its sorrow and anguish had not yet stirred deeply enough the foundations of his being to shake the "literature" out of him He had need of "the gift of sorrow," a spiritual suffering which could and must spur him to battle But he had first to feel that life was at stake and that he must defend himself against destructive forces which threatened his very existence Only under such duress could he find in writing the struggle of life itself, and so become in truth a creative artist

This is what the character of Örnulf reveals to us Ibsen was

himself writhing under the sense that he lacked a wholly personal content in his writing, the sense that he was still not free, not himself. He wrote chiefly for others, and he felt happy when others were touched, but at bottom he longed to give what was exclusively his own.

*The Vikings* proved to be a splendid piece of dramatic art, in Björnson's opinion the most strongly dramatic that had up to that time appeared in Norway, but it was no more than *The Feast at Solhoug* an impetus to literary progress, being—so Björnson again pronounced—so perfect in its kind that it was impossible to produce anything new in the same style. Ibsen still faced the necessity for a new foundation on which to build his work.

### THE NORWEGIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

A FEW days before Ibsen began writing *The Vikings at Helgeland* he signed a new agreement with the Bergen theater. The five year period for which he had bound himself in 1852 was over on April 1, 1857. On April 11 he agreed to remain for another year at the same salary. During the last years he had been permitted to work a trifle more independently than before, at least in the matter of instruction, but the position he held was still a subordinate one.

Then there was an unexpected turn of affairs. Somewhat later in the spring of 1857 it happened that one of the Bergen actors received a letter from a trustee of the "Christiania Norwegian Theater" inquiring whether there might be in Bergen a man able and willing to become "artistic director" for this theater. The actor took the letter to Ibsen, who promptly answered that he would come if the terms were reasonable and if he could be released from his position in Bergen. His enthusiasm was so kindled by the hope of getting away from Bergen that he took the trouble of going to Oslo immediately for more information about the Norwegian Theater there. On the very day that he was to set out, in the middle of July, he received from the management a formal offer of the position as director with a salary of 600 specie-dollars a year, twice as much as he had in Bergen, and a hope of increased pay if the theater was successful. More detai

mined than ever to take the new position, he went to Oslo, and, after making a few inquiries there, he wrote to the trustees of the theater in Bergen, asking to be released from his contract.

"The personal advantages to me of living in the capital I do not need to emphasize, they are preponderate. And much as it would grieve me to leave Bergen and the Bergen Theater, I wonder if it would not be indefensible in me to reject the present opportunity to secure a somewhat remunerative position. Though I am speaking here of salary and advantages, I am in truth neither selfish nor ungrateful. What I owe to the Bergen Theater I shall never forget, but I have also duties to myself, and conditions at the Bergen Theater have long weighed oppressively on me. In every direction in which I might work, the way has been blocked. I have never been given free hands, and I have therefore felt myself constantly weighed down by the thought of having to labor without producing."

Reading the letter, one understands what a deliverance it must have been to him to get away from the tasks at which he had labored for five years, and how he "awaited with longing" the reply from the trustees. The trustees understood the situation as well as he did, and immediately granted his request. On August 11 he was able to make a final agreement with the Christiania Norwegian Theater, whereafter he hastened across the mountains back to Bergen to make preparations for moving. On September 3, 1857, he took over the work as director in Oslo.

He was now in his thirtieth year, and life had perhaps never seemed so bright to him before. Never had he set out on a journey with so much courage and hope in his heart as now when he looked forward to his new work in Oslo. During the same sum-

mer he had finally succeeded in printing what up to that time he considered his best work, *Lady Inger of Östråt*. His old friend Botten Hansen had accepted the play for his paper, *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* and as a reprint from this paper it was put on sale that fall. The same summer, also, he had written most of a new drama which he rated still higher, *The Vikings at Helgeland*. He seemed to carry in him a sense of victory.

A fresh, youthful, national spirit was in the air. It was no longer merely the somewhat subdued national tone of Welhaven and Andreas Munch, nor the merely decorative folk settings of Rolf Olsen or P. A. Jensen. Asbjørnsen, Jørgen Moe, Østgaard, Landstad, and Aasen had created a taste for a much deeper nationalism, and it was just at this time that Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson appeared. In the summer of 1857 he published his first book, the peasant story *Synnøve Solbakken*, which spoke more warmly to the heart of the Norwegian people than any book had done before.

When Ibsen arrived in Oslo in July of the same year, Bjørnson was one of the first persons whose acquaintance he made, and they both felt at once that they were brothers in battle for the same cause. Bjørnson, in a letter written early in August, said that "the playwright from Bergen" was in the city, and he was already able to add "I love him", and Ibsen, having been given *Synnøve* for travel reading as he set out on the overland journey through Valdres back to Bergen, became devoted to Bjørnson. Two months later the two sat side by side in the Christiania Theater to see the first performance of *Between the Battles*, and soon after each of them sent a saga play, *The Vikings* and *Lame Hulda* respectively, to the trustees of the same theater.

Again, only two weeks after that, Bjornson, who had been called to the assistance of Ole Bull, set out for Bergen to take charge of the theater which Ibsen had just left. Each was now director of his own Norwegian theater. It seemed propitious, and they both found strength and joy in the thought.

For five years Ibsen remained director of the Christiania Norwegian Theater, beginning his work with energy and enthusiasm, and undoubtedly finding, in his life and work in Oslo, many a happy hour. More and more, however, his courage gave way to a sense of defeat and broken hopes, until at last he found himself in the unhappiest period of his life, a time more deeply unhappy than even the first dark years in Grimstad.

At the time when Ibsen took over the management of the Norwegian Theater in Oslo, it had just gone through a serious crisis. Applications to the Storting, first for an annual subsidy and later for a loan for building purposes, had both been rejected, though by a majority of only fifty-seven votes against forty-nine. This was in the latter part of June, 1857, and the theater, compelled to reorganize on a new basis, did so on the very day (July 21) that Ibsen came to the city to make arrangements for his new position, and did so with precisely the purpose of placing the management in the hands of a director. Ibsen was thus put there to save the theater.

The Christiania Norwegian Theater was founded in the fall of 1852, modestly calling itself at first merely "a dramatic school." Despite this modesty it had a bold national program, inspired by the Norwegian theater in Bergen, and given impetus by chagrin over the fact that the Bergen theater was so *mildly* national. Here it was the intention to establish a truly Norwegian





THE UNIVERSITY OF OSLO SHORTLY AFTER THE  
BUILDINGS WERE COMPLETED, ABOUT 1857



AKERSHUS, THE OLD FORTRESS AT OSLO ABOUT 1860  
FROM A DRAWING BY ARCHITECT VON HANNO



theater in which the literary language should be given a fully Norwegian pronunciation, and in which it was planned to gradually bring even the Norwegian vernacular on the stage

The success of the first managers in approaching their aim compels surprise and admiration, yet they were unable to prevent the new theater from taking a second place. Actors and audience were both second rate, and the stage room in Møllergata was small and inconvenient. The theater was forced to subsist on Danish vaudevilles and French farces, and to make it a chief requirement of its actors that they have good voices for singing. Despite these compromises, Ibsen found the theater deep in debt when he arrived. Was it reasonable to expect that he should be able to lift it out of the mire in which it was sunk?

He possessed determination and a program, some of which he already announced in September, 1857, in his prologue to *The Mountain Adventure* (*Fjeldeventyret*). He paid tribute to the poet and the composer for being the first to release "the native voice," to awaken tones from "the world of common life," from "the peasant's lays," and from "the sound of the lur." It was the national program which he had time and again outlined for the theater in Bergen, and which he now had opportunity to carry into practice in Oslo. We may assume that he was partly responsible for the fact that the theater, in November of the same year, offered a prize for the best drama, preferably a music drama, sent in to it, with the stipulation that the "subject must be taken from the life of our own people, or from our own history."

Further indications of his plan we may gather from the theater notes which he wrote throughout the fall of 1857 for *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*. The practice of the editor, Botten Hansen, in using

the director of one of the city theaters as critic of the presentations at the other, may seem to us strange at the outset, and before many months the situation became impossible. But at first there was no such enmity between Ibsen and the Christiania Theater as developed in the early part of 1858, and there is at least one permanent value in these reports: they clearly reveal what standard Ibsen set for both drama and presentation.

Even more strongly than he had already done it in *The Man* in 1851, he condemned the whole of the French dramatic school which only created roles and dialogue without offering any intellectual content. Insisting that national character should be evident in the inner life of the drama, not merely in outward action, he returned time and again to the general underlying principle that art should attain to something far beyond the mere imitation of nature or actual life, that it should strive for intellectual truth, for that "higher symbolic representation of life" which could "clarify the people's fermenting thoughts." He ridiculed a public which wanted only photographic art, and which failed to understand that in true art there must be an "uplifting power."

Wishing to build up his repertoire on the basis of such ideals, he also required that the actors, in presenting it, should adhere to the same principles. Among his dramatic criticisms we find one which deals at length with the whole matter of stage instruction, and here we see how he wanted the instructor to strive for the expression of the author's innermost thoughts, so that even lines which on the surface did not seem to say much, might acquire dramatic content and intellectual meaning.

Thus he made high demands on the director of a theater. But

his own opportunities for trying to advance by any new plan were small during the first year, the season being already in progress when he began, and his knowledge of his own actors being but slight. Things went on pretty much in the accustomed way, and such new plays as he presented were for the most part borrowed from his experience in Bergen. He worked carefully at the staging and made sure that the ensemble was good. Otherwise there was but small evidence of a change in management.

That he still regarded the Norwegian Theater as second in rank was shown when, at the beginning of November, 1857, he proffered his own play, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, to the old Danish Christiania Theater. It was through this action that he came into conflict with the rival theater, whereby in turn he was driven into an ever sharper battle for national principles both within and outside of the theater.

The play was accepted by the Christiania Theater for presentation in the spring of 1858. But when, as the time approached, Ibsen wished to inquire about some matter of staging, he was informed that since the theater could not afford to pay his royalty at this time, the trustees had decided to postpone the production for another year. Ibsen became furiously angry, and on the very next day, March 10, he appeared in *Aftenbladet*, which might be called the national liberal paper of Oslo, with a sharp controversial article against the Christiania Theater. He interpreted the communication which had been sent him to mean that this theater would, for the immediate future, "be unable to support, encourage, or on the whole concern itself with Norwegian dramatic literature," in fact that it had "broken down the bridge" between itself and this literature. Now, he declared, there must inevitably

be open warfare in the theatrical world, a gathering in defense of either a Norwegian or a Danish theater in Norway, for the Christiania Theater had shown its true face and proved itself to be no more national now than it was twenty years ago

It may appear that Ibsen struck harder than the occasion demanded, and it was soon thrown in his teeth that only his "unbounded vanity" induced him to carry on in this manner. Surely he could not identify all of "Norwegian dramatic literature" with himself alone.

His vigorous angel, however, had not misinterpreted the contemptuous tone of superiority which the theater management found it permissible to use toward an insignificant Norwegian author. Of this there was clear enough evidence in the writer who was delegated to open a defense of the theater in *Christiania-Posten*. He undertook to show Ibsen his proper place, to point out that since "he belonged with the insignificant writers" he could not speak on behalf of national literature. "As a dramatic author," wrote this man, "Herr Ibsen is a great nonentity, about whom the nation cannot with any ardor set up a protecting hedge. *The Feast at Solhoug* is altogether too lacking in the freshness of originality to inspire any hopes for his future, and his next dramatic work, *Lady Inger of Östråt*, is to an astonishing degree shorn of idealism and poetry. Every character in the plays bears the stamp of baseness—Herr Ibsen must be able to understand that under these circumstances the public cannot look forward with longing to his *Vikings*, and that the present times are not auspicious for putting on the stage a drama which is probably but mediocre." The writer was further of the opinion that Ibsen's plays could not be considered national merely because they were

written by a Norwegian "That national feeling which is content with feeding on native weeds, is not worth much consideration" On the other hand, the writer knew where our people should find satisfaction for their national needs "In A Munch lies the interest of the nation But Herr Ibsen may not compare himself with him" Nor did he hesitate to add "H. Ø. Blom's *Tordenskjold* is indisputably the best among Norwegian plays"

Such rough sarcasm could not but act as venom to the wound, and others besides Ibsen were angry Bjornson came out in *Bergensposten* with the opinion that *The Vikings at Helgeland* was in the dramatic field the foremost thing that had yet been written in Norway "It will prove, when once acted, to be more effective on the stage than any drama of ours has ever been before"

The drama was published in the midst of the controversy, printed toward the close of April as a supplement to *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, and the reviewer J. Lieblein, writing in *Morgenbladet*, hailed it at once as "a genuinely national drama" Not everyone shared his enthusiasm, and various opinions were expressed, but generally people thought that the drama represented the days of the ancient saga in a more strongly Norwegian manner than any earlier play had done—that it brought us home from Oehlenschläger

In February Ibsen had ventured to send his play to the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, but the new saga style led to its abrupt rejection In five days J. L. Heiberg had his verdict ready, and it is of curious interest to know that he condemned *The Vikings* upon the same fundamental principles that Ibsen himself had stated as recently as in the spring of 1857 "The Icelandic sagas

have so marked an epic character that they can only be damaged by the dramatic form. The wildness and coarseness which they portray are in the original form softened by the epic presentation, but when they are dramatized the subject matter stands out in all its crudity." Seven weeks earlier he had similarly rejected Björnson's *Lame Hulda*, and he now gave his judgment of both plays in the form of a prophecy: "A Norwegian theater will hardly proceed from the laboratory of these experiments, and the Danish is fortunately in no need of them."

Though Heiberg failed to appreciate the tremendous dramatic power evident in *The Vikings*, his criticism, at least in the case of Ibsen, proved true. *The Vikings* did not become the basis of the new Ibsen drama. Yet Ibsen still believed that he should continue as he had begun. Just as he had written *Olaf Lofjekrans* after *The Feast at Solhoug*, so he now laid his plans for a new saga drama to follow *The Vikings*, taking his subject from the latest volume of P. A. Munch's *History of the Norwegian Nation*, published in 1857 and dealing with the civil war period in Norway. Ibsen's dramatic imagination was stirred by the last of the revolutionary throne pretenders, Skule Bårdsson, in whom he discovered the inner conflict which gave psychological interest to the struggle. At the same time he wished to present to his own times the demand for national unity which rose out of the civil wars.

For some time the new drama remained a mere plan, Ibsen being unable to find the proper dramatic form for his subject, and before he had time to attain his end, both his plan and his subject were deeply transformed in his own mind.

The thing of importance at the time was the fact that the con



troversy about *The Vikings* had indeed developed into a question of choosing between Norwegian and Danish drama in Norway, a contest in which Ibsen succeeded in making it clear both to himself and to others that it was precisely in the interests of Scandinavian and general European harmony of effort that he wished to further the growth of national culture in Norway "Culture is unthinkable apart from national life" and "the great dream of Scandinavian union" for which he, too, was enthusiastic could never be realized unless Norway achieved equality with the other countries as being "absolutely and in every respect independent"

With this thought in mind he made it his purpose to raise his own theater, the Norwegian, to a place of first rank in Norwegian dramatic art, and during no other year did he throw himself so completely into his theater work as he did in the season that had just begun, 1858-59. He produced almost twice as many new dramas as in any other year, and by general admission they were uniformly well acted. Realizing that if he would make of the second theater a truly national institution, he must depend chiefly on his own plays, he ventured, despite the small stage and indifferent actors at his command, to present *The Vikings* in November, 1858, and *Lady Inger* in April, 1859.

*The Vikings* was greeted with approval. The theater had gone to a considerable expense for settings, everything was done in proper style, and the entire production was, as one of the reviews put it, "free from every positive fault." But this counted for but little since the actors themselves had too little wing power to lift the drama into the realm of great art. Though the play attracted

a good house at first, and was performed eight times, it was never a financial success Björnson produced it at the theater in Bergen, but with even poorer results.

With the appearance of *Lady Inger* in the spring, Ibsen's failure was made complete. The actors were in no way adequate, and the play could be given only twice.

Ibsen had failed entirely in the program that he had laid out for himself. While the income of the theater had in some degree increased, expenditures had increased much more, and the season closed with a large deficit. That it survived as well as it did must be attributed to the farces and vaudevilles, which were almost as numerous as before. Ibsen himself, balancing the accounts at the end of the year, admitted his defeat. "In theater work one learns to be practical, one grows accustomed to admit the power of circumstances and temporarily to renounce higher considerations when it cannot be otherwise."

There must have been a sting of humiliation in thus giving up, and deferring to a public taste which he disclaimed, as was, for instance, the case when *Lady Inger* was replaced by two "neat" English dancers who kept the house filled evening after evening throughout the spring.

He opened the new season of 1859-60 with *The Vikings at Helgeland* accompanied by a prologue which, while it had the form of a memorial poem to King Oscar I, was really a plea for the national literature, which had come into existence during the years of his reign.

*Native poetry and drama*

*Under him made bold advance*

The poet asked

*What makes a people rich and strong,  
As its hill and mountain story,  
As its olden days of glory,  
Pictured forth in play and song?*

He held hopes that at least "once, perchance in the distant future," such a literature should come into bloom

But for the present things did not look promising *The Vikings* was played only once and was followed by the return of entertaining pieces which by means of singing, farcical acting, and pretty ladies appealed to the large public The great drawing card at this particular time was a "dramatic diversion with singing and dancing" imported from Copenhagen and written for the great Spanish dancer, Pepita, though Oslo had to content itself with a local Danish dancer instead A part of the entertainment consisted in ridiculing the efforts toward nationalism in Norway, as personified by the "Norwegian Norseman," Herr Bjerkebæk of Drammen He was the only character in the play who spoke Norwegian—the dialect of Vika, Oslo's East Side All the other actors at this Norwegian theater spoke Danish or German

The newspapers expressed their disgust at such "empty trash," such "*nichtswürdige* bagatelles," and wondered what had become of the *Norwegian* theater "It is incomprehensible to us that the whole theater, in undisturbed and genial indolence, is permitted to go on its way toward the beaten tracks of Danish inanity—under the leadership of a *Norwegian* dramatist"

Ibsen, too, was ill at ease He had thrown himself with fervent

energy into the cause of nationalism and had never felt more strongly national in his interests than he did just now. During these two years that he had lived in Oslo he had become a sort of national festival poet to whom one might turn on every occasion—on memorial celebrations, May Seventeenth celebrations, on the days of Turnvereins and rifle corps, picture mottoes, or whatever else one might want. He was ready at all times to produce national festival lyrics, almost none of which were later included in his poetry collections.

Nor was it only upon encouragement from others that he wrote on national subjects. In the fall of 1858 he tried his hand at a long narrative poem from the same period as that in which he had placed *The Feast at Solhoug*. The subject of the poem, which he called *King Haakon's Guild Hall*, was Audun of Hegersnes, who dreamed of winning the kingdom of Norway. The poem was never finished, and Ibsen was unable, for all his effort and all his Norwegian phraseology, to give it any genuine national tone. However, the intention was clear enough.

At New Year, 1859, he uttered his sharp "Gull's Cry" in answer to a Danish request that Norwegians should cease their separatist efforts to develop a distinct Norwegian language. While he admitted that there was but little beauty in the Norwegian gull's cry over the sea, he pointed out that by its very nature the gull was unable to cry otherwise. Quite as "bitterly angry" as the Danes whom he attacked, Ibsen suggested that they had better look out for themselves and their own Danish language instead of carping at the Norwegians.

*You, Danish man, yourself are poor  
In power and path of word*

In Danish poetry he found altogether too much of the German spirit

*To hero sons ye gave your praise,  
But German was the song  
Your daughters' weeping, bardic lays,  
Were in that stranger tongue  
In tales about your saga-folk  
The German rune's your best  
The times demand now break that yoke,  
And if ye dare not—then invoke,  
Worthless, the grave's dull rest*

During this time, the winter of 1858-59, there raged the greatest and most heated language controversy that had ever taken place in Norway. Vinje had touched a match to the question with his organ, *The Dalesman*. Bjornson in Bergen was charmed and attracted by the new Norwegian vernacular, and Ibsen also felt toward it something of sympathetic relationship, a feeling which is evident in his use of Norwegian words and expressions in "The Gull's Cry," and other poems of the same period. Writing a poem for a tableau at the theater, he used so many Norwegian words that the Danish actor who was to recite it became angry and said that he would have nothing to do with it. Ibsen, however, wrote things that were even worse than this.

In 1859, undertaking to provide his own theater with the national music drama for which it had during the two previous years vainly offered a prize, he set about to change *Olaf Laksen* into an opera called *The Mountain Bird*, in which he used a much broader Norwegian language than he had ever employed earlier. It is clearly a part of the language controversy. One must

admit that the tone is somewhat labored, and that this is not Ibsen's natural speech. He was unable to complete the work, but he really wished to be Norwegian.

Another attempt to strike a blow for Norwegian art was made in October, 1859, when he entered a petition to the new Storting for a yearly contribution toward the expenses of the Christiania Norwegian Theater. The amount was set at two thousand specie dollars, twice as much as the entire deficit for the preceding season. In his application Ibsen explained "the importance of national feeling in the intellectual life and development of a people," and especially "the high significance of national art." Pointing out the value of dramatic art in the life of the people, he showed how disastrous it would be if this art were "forced by circumstances and adverse conditions to take a false direction." "Under such adverse conditions a theater, instead of *leading* its public, is too often forced to *follow* it, and to permit itself in matters of detail to be carried away by the prevalent, often corrupted, taste." Now if the Norwegian theater should be free to properly fulfill its national mission, a considerable State appropriation was necessary.

We see that Ibsen had not yet given up all hope of retrieving himself and the theater from their "mistaken course," and just at this time he gained a powerful ally in the battle, when Björn stjerne Björnson returned to Oslo in the fall of 1859 to be part editor of *Aftenbladet*. The brief friendship of 1857 was renewed, and the faith and courage that dwelt in Björnson became a source of strength to Ibsen. Of their personal association during the winter that followed, we have external evidence in the fact that Björnson was sponsor to the son, Sigurd, who was born to Ibsen

at Christmas time, 1859 Especially were the two bound together in their efforts for the cause of national literature and art

The same Henrik Ibsen who was later an enemy of all union and amalgamation, at this time, November, 1859, persuaded Bjornson to assist him in the founding of the Norwegian Society for "the encouragement of nationalism in literature and art," and especially for the support of Norwegian dramatic art Björnson became president of the society—Ibsen did not feel equal to the position—and throughout the entire winter it served as a gathering place for all sorts of people with national interests members of the Storthing, journalists, scientists, artists They met on Tuesday evenings and entertained each other with speeches, conversation, and music In December both Ibsen and Bjornson were included in a special committee which had the object of gathering Norwegian actors from the three Oslo and Bergen theaters for united presentations at the Christiania Theater the next summer It was a thought which Ibsen had suggested as early as in the theater controversy of 1858 But again one disappointment followed upon another

In a way, it is amusing to recall that forty years later, when Ibsen was a guest of the Swedish Authors' Association, he said "It has been a remarkable experience for me to be present here I do not remember that I have ever belonged to any society, and I almost believe that it is the first time I have been present in one " As a rule Ibsen had a distinct memory for incidents both great and small in his own life, but this time he was indeed mistaken One might think that he had tried to strike out all memory of his youth before he became the great lonely one The facts are that at one time he had for more than a year (1850-51) been

active in the Students' Association and in the Literary Society, that during the last two winters in Bergen, 1855-57, he had been an active member of the Society of December Twenty-second, that in 1858 when a Norwegian Carl Johan Association was formed, he became a member and remained so until after 1880. He was also a member of the Christiania rifle corps from the time of its organization in 1859. And now in 1859 he even made the first move in organizing a society.

Perhaps it was this last experience that later kept him away from societies and associations of every sort, for the Norwegian Society became too large and too political for his taste. He did not feel at home where so many people were gathered, and he had little interest in the politics which filled the winter of 1859-60, struggles about the new reform party and about the relation to Sweden. Furthermore, the Storting again, on May 18, 1860, declined a request for an appropriation to the Norwegian Theater, only a small minority of twenty eight voting in its favor. Not even all the Storting members who belonged to the Norwegian Society voted for the appropriation. At the same time the Christiania Theater refused to admit the plays which the committee of the Norwegian Society wished to present. The way seemed closed in every direction, and aside from words and fine phrases, Ibsen saw no apparent results of the association he had started.

Toward the close of 1859 he burst into a "national" fit of anger similar to that of the spring of 1858, an evidence of the intolerable mood which prevailed in him. A certain poet of the old Wergeland school, H. Ø. Blom, published in *Morgenbladet* a farewell poem upon the departure of the Danish actor Vilhelm



Wiehe, from Oslo to Copenhagen Blom, who had at one time been a nationalist, now thought that if the Danes left the Norwegian stage, it would be impossible to properly maintain a theater in the country, and that the event would clearly be the Ragnarok of Norwegian dramatic art. As an example he pointed to the Christiania Norwegian Theater

*In Møllergaten is a house of players  
Where I have doubtfully been entertained  
There is a bit of verve, and there are ladies  
Whom one may look at without being pained,  
But ah, the language! lady sweet of heaven  
Who proudly guards the sacred Thalia's door,  
If unto us the same hodge-podge is given  
I swear that we will call the fare too poor*

On that stage, he went on to say, one heard all kinds of vulgarisms which showed that the Norwegians had not mastered dramatic art. On the contrary, he proclaimed,

*The pattern for the Northern art of drama  
In Copenhagen yet will long remain*

Ibsen's anger boiled over. This was an attack, not only on things he believed in, but on the very work to which he had dedicated his life, and three days later, December 10, there appeared in *Aftenbladet* a "Letter to H. Ø. Blom" seventeen stanzas long. Altogether uninspiring toward his opponent, he berated him for poor verses as well as for currish thoughts, and compared him to an "embalmed corpse." The thing of interest in the poem is its lively anger and its assurance of the "dawn of a new born day beyond the ridge." The young poet

is quite willing to believe that a Ragnarök is due to descend upon the Valhall to which H. Ö. Blom adhered, the Danish Christiania Theater. But he declares that

*—to heaven highest*

*Is not Valhalla, but young Gimle mghest*

The native Norwegian language he defends against all charges, wishing only that it may become a purer Norwegian

*Read where you will, and you shall find it true,*

*We use the wording of our Danish neighbors,*

*And even Vinje's thought in bondage labors*

This disparagement of the use of Danish in Norway was deleted twelve years later when Ibsen included the poem in his collection, but at the time of writing it was filled with the spirit of national indignation which inspired the writer.

Blom retorted promptly in *Morgenbladet* of December 13 with a poem as long and coarse as it was meager in content. He, being a poet ten years older, pointed out to the impertinent youngster his proper place

*But I am H. Ö. Blom, that makes a difference!*

*And you are Henrik Ibsen—nothing more!*

Considering that the rest of the poem was merely coarse abuse without any point, there was really nothing to answer, but Ibsen, at least as angry as he had been before, rushed to *Aftenbladet* with a rhymed letter, "Lines in Haste to H. Ö. Blom," fourteen stanzas long. Björnson stuck the poem in his pocket without printing it, and quite properly, for it was a mere collection of abusive terms in rhyme—"old garrison fellow," "broken windfall," "humbug whife," "Tyboe," etc. While the rhymes are often amusing, and while there is an abundance of ultra Norwegian

words, the thing of main interest is again the reckless anger of the poem. Clearly, Ibsen must have been struck in a tender spot, to cry out so!

It did no good to become angry. He knew only too well that he was facing defeat in his work, and one wonders if he did not secretly feel that he had permitted himself to be drawn into the Norwegian movement more deeply than his convictions approved. He must sometimes have asked himself if at bottom his effort for nationalism was thoroughly genuine.

### A MIND DIVIDED

**I**BSEN lived with a divided mind during these years. While his work at the Norwegian Theater, his friendship with Bjornson, and many other things prodded him to the fight for Norwegian nationalism and filled him with warmth and enthusiasm, other influences within himself and in his surroundings sowed in his mind the seeds of doubt and kept his critical sense awake.

During the very same winter (1859-60) that he was most closely associated with Bjornson, whom he even persuaded to help him form the Norwegian Society, he moved more frequently than ever before in a circle of friends who were imbued with an altogether different spirit, a group which gathered under the insignia "the learned Holland."

The name was really an affectionate appellation for the book-filled work room of Paul Botten Hansen, and had been invented at a time when he had made an especially fortunate find as a book collector. When Ludvig Daae, one of his friends, who was also an enthusiastic collector, heard of it, he burst out "Shame on the Hollander, his spies are everywhere." It was a quotation from Holberg's *Jacob von Tyboe* which was thus applied to Botten Hansen and his home, and later also to his friends, among whom he was called the "ancestral Hollander." Those who made themselves at home in his "Holland" shared the name

Botten Hansen was the best informed literary critic in Norway at the time, and an ardent lover of books, fond of the rare and old and unusual, but just as much or more interested in things that were unknown because they were new. Having given up his own youthful dream of becoming a poet, he paid close attention to the production of new books, and regarded them with the feeling of a sort of foster father. The weekly paper which he edited, *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, was a treasure trove of information about contemporary literature, and his work room in Raadstugata became a favorite gathering place for lovers of books and literary art.

Needless to say, Ibsen, on his return from Bergen to Oslo, immediately became a regular visitor at the quarters of his old friend. The acquaintance had been maintained while Ibsen was in Bergen, and recently Botten Hansen had defended *The Feast at Solhoug* against unfriendly criticism, and had printed *Lady Inger of Östråt* in his paper. Still later he published also *The Vikings at Helgeland*. Though Botten Hansen was not given to flattery, and employed a strongly ironic tone in conversation, Ibsen knew that he could invariably rely on his friendship, and he felt safe and at home in the narrow room crowded with books. While he could contribute nothing to the creation of a learned Holland, he loved literature, and he met here new friends who were among the best scholars in the land.

First of all there was M. Birkeland, later director of the Public Record office, "the great vicar" of the learned Holland, who had been associated with Botten Hansen longer and more closely than anyone else. Though his interest lay in history and politics rather than in literature, he possessed a wealth of knowledge

with an unusually clear intellect, and was independent in thought and judgment

Secondly, there was another historical scholar, Ludvig Daae, who although he held Birkeland as his great ideal, had an altogether different temperament. While Birkeland was quiet and unobtrusive, Daae was fiery and vivacious, easily moved to anger or joy, and quite capable, when excited, of performing a solitary war dance among the book shelves. When irritated, he did not, like Botten Hansen, resort to an ironic smile, but to a great store of abusive terms, Latin or Norwegian. In historical outlook he lacked the breadth of Birkeland, and in his studies he was more the antiquarian, sharing with Botten Hansen the collector's passion. All three were alike in their delight upon discovering the human element in books and in history.

Daae had a special connection with Ibsen, being a relative of Susannah Thoresen, who on her mother's side belonged to the Daae family. Ludvig Daae and Susannah were second cousins. He left Oslo soon after Ibsen's arrival and moved to Drammen, where he lived during the years 1859-63, making quite regular journeys back to the capital. After 1859 Botten Hansen, Birkeland, and Ibsen composed the hierarchy of Holland, and the three met almost every day, either at Botten Hansen's or at some café. Subject matter for conversation was always supplied by old or new books belonging to the "ancestral Hollander," or by the events of the day, particularly in politics.

Many others visited Botten Hansen more or less frequently during these years. About 1860 the historical scholar, Oluf Rygh, and the jurist, O. A. Bachke, were practically regular members of Holland, and in 1861 an old friend of Botten

Hansen's, the philologist Jakob Lokke, moved to the city and became as good a Hollander as Birkeland and Ibsen themselves, though making a study of language rather than books. He was a steady going, dependable fellow, more dogmatic in his thinking than the others, with the possible exception of Birkeland, who on his side was perhaps equally immovable.

Many members of this group—such men as Birkeland, Daase, Bachke, and Lokke—were later among the leaders in conservative politics, but it was not until toward the close of the sixties that political divisions hardened in clear lines. Similarly, other contrasts which later became sharp were still somewhat indistinct. Thus one finds associated with Botten Hansen many who in our opinion would seem to belong to quite other groups, such as A. O. Vinje, J. E. Sars, and, during the winter of 1859-60, even Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. They had national, historical, and literary interests to bind them together.

Yet the learned Holland was governed by a spirit quite different from that of the Norwegian Society. For Ibsen the greatest attraction to his Hollander friends lay in their sober sense for the real, for fact and actual conditions. They cared much more for the past than for the future and were inclined to be *suspicious of any idealistic faith in progress*. They judged every thing by what they observed close at hand, and feared what might be in any way strained or unnatural—whatever was designed to shape society or intellectual life according to ready-made plans. Thus they were opposed to all language agitation, including Bjørnson's attempt to introduce Norwegian words and phrases into the prevailing Danish literary language, as well as Vinje's attempt to build up a new Norwegian literary language.

from the dialects. Also, democratic politics seemed to them often affected and spurious. The critical power in these men was stronger than the impulse to action.

Quite naturally, Ludvig Holberg was their favorite author. There were people among them who knew his comedies almost by heart, and quotations from Holberg spiced all their conversation. Ibsen had loved Holberg even in his Grimstad days, finding in him much of the love of irony, the sense of the ludicrous, which he himself possessed, and after his six lonely years in Bergen it was a joy to him to give free reign to his satire in Holberg's spirit. In the Hollander circle he was even given the nickname "Gert Westphaler," taken from one of Holberg's comedies.

It may seem strange that he who was usually so silent and unapproachable, should have anything in common with Gert "the talkative barber," but in a circle of good friends he would sometimes be quite voluble, and especially if goaded by anger or irritation. Then he cracked his whip in Holberg's manner at current hypocrisy and smallness of spirit. At such times he spared no one, he was absolutely reckless. At other times his chief delight would be to sit in his corner of the sofa and utter tremendous paradoxes or argue propositions that appeared self-contradictory on the face of them. What would happen, he suggested, to an owl that was afraid of the dark, or to a fish that could not bear the water, or to a man who was lowered to the center of the earth and did not know the difference between up and down? Was there not a possibility that the axiom that two and two are four might be invalid on Sirius? Ibsen's friends, considering this a strange sort of talk, compared it to the bab-



blings of Gert Westphaler in Holbeig Ibsen himself derived from it practice in dialectics and an opportunity to try the strength of his thought, as well as an outlet for his criticism and doubt, which thus assailed old truths

We can be fairly certain that as long as he harbored these critical thoughts, he never yielded himself wholly to the influence of Bjornstjerne Björnson. The other Hollanders could never quite like Björnson, and would not at all submit to his leadership. While they considered him a great poet, perhaps the greatest in Norway, they really cared little for lyric quality and were therefore unable to appreciate him fully. Aside from his poetry, they thought he showed but small ability, especially in his attempts to dominate politics. In the fall of 1859, at the time he moved back to Oslo, an eager Björnson enthusiast declared that Birkeland, Botten Hansen, and Ibsen had "determined not to recognize Bjornson." It is true, many members of the group were amused by Vinje's rough treatment of Bjornson's peasant story *Arne*, and an echo of their judgment of Bjornson appears in a letter from Vinje to Botten Hansen, in which Bjornson is described as a "poor ignoramus."

At other times, Vinje expresses thoughts that might equally well have come from Ibsen, for instance, in a letter of 1860 we read "Good Lord, if one could be as happy as for example B. Bjornson, who believes himself to be a great man and so rests on his laurels!" And some months later "I have not the happy nature of, for instance, B. Björnson, who can sail on the advancing current without once thinking of the receding tide." Ibsen had undoubtedly harbored similar thoughts, wishing to believe thus happily in himself and in the future, even while he dis-

paraged the childishness of such belief. The two impulses contended within him.

A feeling of happiness seemed uppermost during the first period in Oslo. He found pleasure and hope in his work; he had plans for new dramas, he wrote strong and courageous songs. In the spring of 1858 he published among other things the poem "Building Plans," recalling the first time he had anything printed, and the dreams which had then filled his mind—of the cloud castle with its two wings.

*The greater shall shelter a singer immortal*

*The smaller to a maiden shall open its portal*

Now, however, the proportions were reversed. "The great became too little, the little one was all." He looked forward now to married happiness, and in the month of June went to Bergen for his bride. A few days after his arrival there, her father, the old Pastor Thoresen, died, and the marriage ceremony was very quietly performed just after the funeral (June 18, 1858). So now he was married, and had established his own home in Oslo, living at first in the fine new apartment Malthéby in Akersgata.

From this period we have the most courageous, we might almost say the most arrogant, poem that he ever wrote, "The Springtime of Life." The general joy of life expressed in his "Traveler's Song" of 1853 is nothing compared to the bold, personal exultation in this new poem of 1858.

*I must out and away to God's nature free,*

*To the shimmering delight of spring,*

*For my heart beats high, from my cage I flee,*

*For the flight I have courage and wing*

*I have courage to fight 'gainst a world of woe,  
It has held me too long a slave,  
Now I exult as I laugh and go  
To meet with the springtime brave*

*My mind is a ship with its sails all set,  
I am strong in my youth and free  
My path leads upward, and I shall yet  
Strain past you all, you shall see!*

*Overboard with the ballast of care and cark!  
Set the last white shroud with a cheer!  
And what if I shatter my roaming bark,  
I sail not in the rear!*

This is so youthfully unrestrained that one wonders how Ibsen can have written it. Furthermore, he looks back with disapproval upon the poetry of discouragement which he had written in his earliest youth.

*Elegiac rime flowers I breathed upon  
My window pane's frosty night  
A single beam from the heart's warm sun  
Has put that chilly stuff to flight*

He felt a new poetry welling up within him. He sang "joyous songs of spring," for spring lived in his own heart.

Yet the poem ends abruptly and was never finished. Spring time died within him, and he broke off in the middle of a stanza in which we wonderingly hear a new and bitter tone. As he looks out upon a hillside set with straight young pines, the thought which strikes him is this

*Under these the way goes forward,  
Never mind where to—  
Never mind, if but not homeward—*

No longer satisfied to simply commune with nature, he wants to get far, far away. His homeland has become a cage where his flight is restrained and his wings are clipped.

The poem itself proves the truth of his later statement that he began even in 1858 to think of the subject which developed into *Love's Comedy*, and which thrust aside the historical drama about Earl Skule. The phrase "if I shatter my roaming bark" has been retained in this new drama, though with a changed meaning, an undertone of irony which leads into discouragement and loss of hope. "Life's springtime" ended in shipwreck.

A contrast between life and poetry began to be evident to him. Though life had certainly now attained, as he said later, "a more weighty content," he did not know how to give the new content a poetic form. Recently he had longed for a great sorrow which might awaken his soul. For a while he thought that he had struggled through his difficulty, but the thought returned, and he found no peace. Strained tightly by the cords of life about him, he felt that he could not cry out as he longed to do.

Ibsen was a facile verse-maker, and all the world came to his door to demand poems. He promised generously, but internally he shrank from this work and was likely not to have the poems finished before the printer's boy stood in the room. He felt that his mind was depleted by such production, but much as he longed to break away, he knew no way of escape.

Even the work in which he was engaged became more and more irksome to him. For one thing, he was compelled, at the Christiania Norwegian Theater, to work for a nationalism which seemed increasingly unnatural to him. Tired of being compelled to be Norwegian, he began to protest against the homespun language which was required of his actors, and to try instead to create a freer, easier form of "polite speech", but he was not permitted to do as he pleased, and his growing anger had to be confined within him.

While in the actual management of the theater he had much more freedom here than he had as mere instructor in Bergen, the routine work demanded his attention so completely that he was still bound, and even in a worse way than formerly. In Bergen it had been a part of his work to write, here he simply had no leisure to do so. He frittered away his creative talent in the writing of inconsequential verses, but not a single dramatic work did he manage to complete in all the five years that he was theater director.

He felt this bitterly. It was of this period in Oslo that he was thinking when he advised Bjornson in 1867 not to undertake the work at a theater. "One might stand the work, if a waste of time were the only ill effect—if poetic visions, moods, and images were but shoved aside to return later. But it is not so. *New* visions will appear, but the intervening ones die unborn, and theater work becomes to a dramatist a repeated act of abortion. Civil law prescribes punishment for this crime, but I do not know if the Lord is more liberal." To this he added "Talent is no privilege, it is a duty." He had some feeling that he was

betraying his highest duty during these years, and expresses his regret in a line in *The Pretenders* "Songs unsung are ever the fairest"

Returning during this period to the painter's art, which he had never quite laid aside, he studied oil painting under Magnus Bagge, and at least until 1861 had always some painting or other on his sketching stool. Though he found in this a kind of outlet for his creative energy, he was conscious that it was no more than a makeshift.

In the meantime, while Ibsen kept silent, Bjornstjerne Björnson became the great poet of young Norway. Though he had appeared much later than Ibsen and had written but little, he loomed much greater in the Norwegian world of letters. His writings were in a far, far greater degree the true children of his own desire. With *Synnøve Solbakken* he had won the hearts of all his readers, and now in 1859 there appeared first *Arne*, then *A Happy Boy*, and the other peasant stories, new and personal in artistic form, rich in heart-felt warmth.

About his personality there was always a certain breeziness. He was born to be a chieftain—as he himself knew, and as every one else understood. Even his tall, commanding physique bore witness of the fact. While in Bergen he had become a political leader on a national program, and though he was less fortunate when he tried to carry the same program into effect in Oslo, he did attain the position of a national chieftain. His patriotic songs, one after the other, took people by storm.

Against such a figure Ibsen was thrown wholly in the shade. He was small of stature, timid in public appearance, and alto-

gether incapable of creating any sensation about himself. He was helplessly shoved aside. He even had to see that his friend, A. O. Vinje, was at this time given a much greater share of attention than he himself, Vinje having discovered, after 1858, a poetic form which suited his gift, and being in addition a vigorous journalist who made the town, and even the country, talk about him. Ibsen, it is true, had written a few national dramas which were certainly appreciated by a great many people, but none of his work was deeply and powerfully distinguished from what others had done before, and no one expected him to attain new heights beyond and above his earlier writings.

In the spring of 1860 Ibsen, Bjørnson, and Vinje all applied to the State for traveling stipends. Bjørnson asked straight out for support as a poet, which neither Vinje nor Ibsen dared to do. Vinje applied for money to study jurisprudence in England and Scotland, Ibsen wanted an opportunity to study the theaters more closely, and asked funds for a tour of six months to London, Paris, the chief cities of Germany, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. Bjørnson would not be content with less than 1000 specie dollars, Vinje applied for 500, Ibsen for 400. The University included only Vinje in its list of recommendations, and the Government gave 500 specie dollars to Bjørnson and 250 to Vinje. No one thought it necessary to grant Ibsen's request.

Worse than such disappointment, however, was the fact that he was tormented by doubts about his own creative talent. In the summer of 1859, he wrote the poem "In the Picture Gallery," harking back to the doubts which had attacked him in Dresden, seven years earlier. The "loathsome black elf" now

work, and who knows so little of hope that he seems to subsist on the very doubt which he expresses

Even deeper and more bitter is the self judgment in the longer poem, *On the Fells*, which he wrote some months later, toward the close of the year 1859. Here he is in the midst of the crisis, divided between two basic tendencies of his mind, in the conflict between the æsthetic and the ethical view of life. As he himself formulated the contrast, we find the question most clearly and fully expressed in the life philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, and it is undoubtedly from Kierkegaard that Ibsen has learned to raise the question in this form. This does not mean, however, that it is to Ibsen a mere philosophical theory. On the contrary, it goes down to the deepest depths of his soul, raising a conflict which year after year filled his inner life until the victory was finally won by the stronger element in him, the ethical demand. And still the question recurred in his old age, whether the æsthetic had not after all conquered the ethical.

The poem, *On the Fells*, is an exposition of æstheticism as a power that captivates and makes itself master of the mind. Æstheticism is a philosophic view which makes of life a drama, a subject matter for art, while the artist himself remains outside as a mere spectator, or—like the "Seducer" in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*—gives impetus to intellectual and emotional conflict, always, be it noted, in others, so that he can himself enjoy the drama fully. The æsthetic view thus robs romanticism of all manly vigor, makes it what the Danish philosopher, Sibbern, describes as "hollow-eyed"—a way of thinking by which every thing is seen as in a mirror and reaches the mind only by reflection. It is this that J. L. Heiberg made the principle of writing



when he demanded "reflectiveness" rather than inspiration, it is a constant self analysis, by which the freshly natural impulses in man are destroyed

That "I" who relates the history of his inner life in the poem *On the Fells*, has fled from mother and bride and lives in the wilds with nothing but his dreams and his longing. The power which has driven him thither away from life is given the form of the Strange Hunter who teaches him the "freedom" of the fells, who strengthens his desire to live with his own thoughts, and who robs him of "the power to will." From out of this freedom, however, he looks with heartache and anguish upon the fire which on Christmas Eve destroys his home, and with it his old mother. The Strange Hunter, on the other hand, comments coldly on the artistic effect of combined flame and moonlight, and

*He peered through his hollowed hand below  
To get the perspective right—*

until the man who at first had thought only of his own loss had to admit

*—that contrast in lighting, it must be said,  
'Twas a wonderful effect!*

At midsummer time he is able "self-steeled" to look calmly on while his bride rides to her wedding with another man, and to say in his own behalf

*I held to my eye my hollowed hand  
To get the perspective right*

With artistic appreciation he sees

*—her dress! what a fine effect,  
Seen red through the white birch trees!*

and feels that he is free, lifted high above the people of the parish

*The last of my lowland path is trod,  
Up here on the fells must be freedom and God,  
Men do but grope, in the valley*

Ten years later, Ibsen, writing of this poem, describes it as the first fruits of the new life content he had then found, and says that it is sustained by an earnest "craving for freedom." He seems through this poem to release himself from sorrow and spiritual suffering and the defeats of life, and to place about his heart a shield, as it were, of steel like thought as a defense against the world.

There is hardly another poem in all literature which penetrates so deeply into the æsthetic view of life as *On the Fells*, and it expressed a vital need in Ibsen to arm himself with æstheticism, so that he might view life from a distance. How deeply this poem was rooted in his own soul may be seen by a small but unmistakable bit of evidence: it was the first which he could include in his later collections without any change whatever. In thought as well as in form, the poem was perfect at its conception.

Yet all this does not mean that he was ready to accept æstheticism as his life philosophy. On the contrary, the poem was born of a hot inner conflict in which the deepest impulse is the desire to *free* himself from æstheticism. With all his might he battles *against* the danger of becoming, like the Strange Hunter, a cold devotee of art—against the disaster, which to him would be torture, of losing his ability to act. With a sense of terror he feels that

*Parched are the veins where a flood tide ran,  
And I surely find, when my heart I scan,  
All symptoms of petrification*

We may be sure that "petrification" of the heart was no ideal to Ibsen, it would be death to him. Therefore he could be no æsthete, and when in spite of this he felt himself in danger of becoming one, he summoned all his strength in opposition. Years were to pass before he saw the end of the struggle.

"The desire for freedom," he wrote in 1870, which permeated *On the Fells*, "was after all not completely expressed before the writing of *Love's Comedy*." The relation between the poem and the drama, both psychologically and chronologically, is as close as it well can be. The æsthetic view of life is the very subject of *Love's Comedy*, and though the play was not finished before 1862, it was fully planned and even partly written in 1860, just after the poem *On the Fells*. At that time it was a prose drama called *Svanhild*, of which only a fragment remains, sufficient, however, to prove that in thought and scene arrangement it was on the whole the same as the later poetic drama, *Love's Comedy*. In the history of Ibsen's development, then, it belongs to the year 1860, and the words which he wrote about the drama in 1865 must refer to this year. "If it was ever a necessity for an author to free himself of a mood and a subject matter, it was so for me when I set out to write this work."

In the *Svanhild* fragment we meet the poet Falk at the æsthetic stage of his development. Like Ibsen, formerly, he "asks of Heaven a great sorrow," that he may have something to write about. He kills a starling with a stone, that he may write a

poem about it, he requests Svanhild to sing for him until he has had enough, then he will give back the song in poem after poem, life means nothing to him except in so far as it gives subject matter for poetry Svanhild, who is here still hardly more than a child, says of him that he is "really a wicked man," and instinctively he knows that this, put in childish form, is the truth Even in this first version of the drama, Ibsen allowed Falk to burst the æsthetic chrysalis in his desire to discard paper poetry and parlor poetry to come to grips with life itself, but the end is after all a loss of courage, a loss of faith in the possibility that life and art may be harmonized He gives up Svanhild, but through the loss his soul becomes filled with song and with a desire to sing it freely on the mountain heights

Thus the struggle between the æsthetic and the ethical continues in Ibsen, and though æstheticism still has the stronger hold on him, he can never completely submit to it

The thing which gives impulse to the dramatic struggle in *Svanhild* had moved in his thoughts since he first dreamed of becoming a poet We hear it in lyrics that he wrote ten years earlier, at the time when he had to give up his first dream of love Then, in agreement with Heiberg's philosophy, he declared that happiness was not in attainment, but in longing and aspiration, and he asked that the young girl he loved would sing to him

*I thought within thy spirit bright,  
I will bear from height to height,  
Weave my lovely fantasies  
Out of all thy melodies*

That which was once a consolation had now become a conflict within his own soul from which he found no rest. He was compelled to fight the battle out within himself.

In the summer of 1860, upon the death of J. L. Heiberg, Ibsen wrote a memorial poem to which, in a later revised and shortened form, he gave the title "To the Survivors." The surprising thing in this poem is that Heiberg, who through many years had been the great dictator in Danish intellectual circles, suddenly becomes a "thorn-crowned sower" who is "borne down 'twixt traitor shields," and who in his lifetime has met only lack of appreciation. The explanation lies in the verses referring to others in the Scandinavian countries of whom one might say that they bore

*—on their breasts the brand*

*Of the torch themselves had kindled*

Ibsen, filled with the thought of his own struggle, feeling lonely and "borne down 'twixt shields," involuntarily transferred his own experience to Heiberg.

He was in the middle of a period of heaviness, despondency, and hopelessness, such as he had never experienced in all his life after he grew to manhood. The Storting had refused him a subsidy for his theater, and the Government refused to give him money for travel. He was uncertain about his calling as a poet, he could not make of *Svanhild* what he wished, he had not found opportunity to write a drama in three years, and he began to doubt that he would be able to produce another—to doubt even that he had any spiritual basis for writing.

He grew careless about himself. He no longer kept himself as neat and attractive in outward appearance as he had formerly

taken pride in doing. He began to haunt cheap cafés, and people would see him sitting alone with his hand under his chin and a careworn expression about his mouth. He wore an old dented hat, his beard grew untended, and his hair was a tousled mane. He seemed on the point of letting himself go, as if he had quite surrendered.

Of the depths to which he had fallen we find the clearest evidence in the fact that he, who had formerly bent all his energies on the fulfillment of his duties, now began to shirk them, and to be slovenly about his work.

The Norwegian Theater building had been remodeled in the summer of 1860, and with the aid of contributions collected by the trustees from all over the country, it was finally to have a proper stage. But the changes had cost much more than had been expected, and the theater, having acquired a new burden of debt, entered upon the new theatrical season with economic difficulties. All the more it was necessary that the director put forth his best effort.

But this he failed to do. Rather, he gave up the struggle. There is something tragic in the fact that he opened the new theater with such "national" plays as he himself despised, first the vaudeville *Tordenskjold* by H. Ö. Blom, then the musical comedy *The Home of the Fairy* by P. A. Jensen, and later *Gudbrandsdølerne* by Chr. Monsen.

His own national masterpiece, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, he submitted to the Christiania Theater, where it was presented in April, 1861. The play was no triumph for the author, although Laura Svendsen (Fru Gundersen), creating at this time her *Hjördis*, made it something of a new victory for herself. She

had worked out the role more thoroughly than was her custom, and trusted less to the momentary inspiration of her genius. If she still did not attain the highest dramatic power, it may be attributed to the fact that she did not have fellow actors of sufficient talent. We are told that at its first presentation the play "succeeded in arousing in the public a quite unusual interest", but there was only one single paper in the city, *Morgenbladet*, which thought it worth while to comment on what would now be regarded as a great theatrical event. The other papers remained silent, and as the public would not come, the play was laid aside after five performances.

Ibsen had been discouraged beforehand, and his own theater suffered. He, who ordinarily found it easy to dash off verses, could not force himself to write even so much as a prologue for the opening night of the season, and, what was worse, he slackened his efforts in the matters of rehearsal and staging, and no longer upheld discipline among his actors and orchestra. As the season progressed the repertoire grew more and more meager, while the Christiania Theater drew crowds with the same Danish vaudeville on which the Norwegian Theater had made profits during the previous year.

The trustees were more and more dissatisfied, and whenever Ibsen was not present, most of the five members of the Board spoke only ill of him, declaring that his lack of enterprise had ruined the theater. Sometimes he was even compelled to listen to abuse in their meetings. One of the trustees stamped his foot on the floor at him, and another, Assistant Headmaster Knud Knudsen, has told us that he once "gave him a terrible scolding, the like of which he probably never had, before or after." The

chairman of the Board of Trustees thought that Ibsen had been given rather rough treatment, and one of the other members remarked, says Knudsen with evident satisfaction, "that I treated Ibsen almost as if he were a schoolboy" It was probably not very pleasant to be so treated by Knudsen, whom the boys at the Cathedral School called the "growler", but Ibsen met the abuse silently At other times he had tried to defend himself, but Knudsen, at least, had then made no attempt to conceal his anger Knudsen, by the way, found additional occasion for offense in the thought that Ibsen had deserted the national language program of the theater Naturally Ibsen preferred to stay away from the trustees' meetings, so that he might escape "the confessional", but this, too, was sometimes ineffective, as the trustees actually did, on occasion, seek him out in a down town café and, to preclude the possibility of his escape, held their meeting there

Criticism, unfortunately, was not kept within these meetings In the fall of 1860 the papers already began to complain of the lack of instruction at the theater, and Ibsen angrily wrote an article in self defense When, in the early part of 1861, there was another round of such criticism, Ibsen, trying to take the bull by the horns, appeared in *Morgenbladet* (March and April) with a series of articles about "The Two Theaters of Christiania," in which he tried to show that the important thing was the creation of a genuine national spirit in the art of drama, a problem which the old Danish Christiania Theater had never dreamed of solving, but which the Norwegian Theater, now that it had been equipped with a new stage, could at last attack seriously In this connection Ibsen defended the repertoire of the



last year, maintaining that what mattered was not *what* was played but *how* it was played

His lack of ambition at this time is significantly shown by the fact that he never managed to complete this series of articles. Time and again he was urged to continue, but did nothing further. Contrary to his intention, he had provoked new criticism, which in the next two months, May and June, burst upon him in one article after another, in both *Christiana-Posten* and *Morgenbladet*. His attention was called to the contrast between the ideal he proclaimed and the work he performed, and he was criticized for neglect of duty, for his choice of plays, and for his methods of staging. He was openly judged to be unfit for the position of theater director, and there was a demand that Björnson be called to the city to take his place.

He sent an answer to *Aftenbladet*, but confined his discussion to the matter of repertoire, and the tone of his answer was more angry than convincing. Botten Hansen opened a defense in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, but could hardly do more than show what great difficulties Ibsen had labored under. He was forced to recognize that the director should have been more energetic in his work and admitted, though unwillingly, that "opinion was against" Ibsen.

The truth of the admission may be judged by the fact that even one of the actors at the Norwegian Theater ventured, in a lecture to the Norwegian Society, to criticize Ibsen's carelessness as director of the theater. At the annual meeting in August, the president of the Board of Trustees announced to the public "that there had not been such driving energy in the artistic director as might be desired." This was at least as humiliating to

Ibsen as being treated like a schoolboy by the Trustees in the Board meetings

He pulled himself together His inner power of resistance was after all too great to permit him to give way completely Of his victory over himself we have some record in the glorious poem which he wrote in the latter part of 1861, "Terje Vigen "

If it is true that all of Ibsen's best work is born of a deep inner need, of an intensely vivid experience, this must apply in the fullest sense to "Terje Vigen " Few of his other writings have shown such vitality as this, and among his narrative poems it is the only one with which he was sufficiently well satisfied to include it in his final collections Later it has been given a place in all sorts of school readers and anthologies, and one cannot, however often one hears or reads the poem, fail to be deeply moved by it It is straightforward, compact, and vigorous in language and choice of words, and it is a joy to hear the echo of the ballad, here where it no longer dominates every line but simply gives richness and strength to the lyric tone At the same time the poem rises to such moments of tenseness in both incident and spiritual crises that the reader is swept along from stanza to stanza, and it is instinct with a pathos in which there is both a national and an intensely personal tone But that strong pulse beat which goes surging through all of the long poem, proceeds from Ibsen's own experience His own heart's blood has gone into the lonely islander, Terje, and into his conquest over himself

I do not know what circumstances just at this time brought back to Ibsen's mind his days in Grunstad Perhaps his hardships reminded him, more strongly than before, of the difficulties

of those years during which he had despaired of his future. In the spring of 1861 he had written a poem of pilot deeds at Agder, of pilot boys who, though fighting with the Danes, endangered their own lives to rescue a Danish ship. The incident was to the poet an example in proof of how the most patriotic Norwegian would, when danger threatened, be foremost in defense of Denmark. Now the old pilot, Terje Vigen, had become a symbol of his own inner, personal conflict. He had felt

*The years in the prison's choking night,  
They sicken my heart and hope,  
Like wheat that roots on the shelving height,  
I leaned to a dreadful slope*

But the sick mind was healed, the crisis safely passed  
*But on Terje's forehead was clearness and peace,  
His bosom was free and at rest*

*He breathed like a captive loosed from his chain,  
And calmly he turned to speak  
'Now is Terje Vigen himself again  
Till now there was fever in every vein—  
There was vengeance, vengeance to wreak!*

*"But now we are quit 'tis the end of it"*

*He grew open-browed, for the boding cloud  
Had burst in one night of wreck  
Once more he carried erect and proud  
The neck that had grown so bent and bowed  
Since he knelt on the war ship's deck*

It is a fact that Ibsen was seriously ill during the months when "Terje Vigen" was written. He suffered from dark periods of despondency and a high fever that kept him in bed and even threatened his life. Fru Susannah watched over him. One time, chancing to be alone, he rushed out into the streets as if mad, irresistibly driven by an impulse toward self destruction. His wife managed to subdue him. She bore these trying times with out complaint, without a word. There was want and poverty in the home, but erect and proud she went about her household duties with little Sigurd on her arm. Perhaps at times Ibsen himself had felt the meaning of the words that he put into Terje Vigen's mouth:

*"The one ye should thank stands there," he said,*

*"You were saved by the little child."*

One thing is certain: he saved both his life and his courage. With all the power his soul possessed he fought against the doubt and discouragement which threatened to overwhelm him.

His renewed hold on life is clearly evident in his work. In the winter of 1861-62 he centered his energy on the theater as never before. In all this time he was persuaded to write but one single festival poem, and the new season at the Norwegian Theater was in sharp contrast to the previous year. The repertoire was unusual and of high quality. One of the first things to appear was a national historic drama, *Niels Lykke*, by an anonymous author, which in certain respects was almost a continuation of *Lady Inger of Östråt*, though it did not at all measure up in psychological portrayal or in thought content. In these respects there was far greater depth in Bjornson's new drama, *King Sverre*, which followed directly after. Members of the Government and Storting were

invited to see the latter, and Ibsen wrote for it the only one of his prologues which he later considered deserving of a place in his poetry collection, a poem weighty in thought and image, dealing with the Norwegian flag and entitled "The Storthing." Later, in the spring of 1862, Ibsen produced *Lame Hulda*, another drama by Bjornson, which the Christiania Theater had held for more than four years. Between these events he attained the distinction of being the first to present a lyrical drama by Musset on a Norwegian stage. It was the earliest of them all, *Un Caprice*, of 1847. The rest of the season showed a rich and varied choice of plays, and the theater was now generally praised for its fine performances and especially for its thoroughly finished ensemble. There could be no doubt now that Ibsen was working energetically and that the theater was no longer allowed to drift. Ibsen had struggled to his feet again.

Then, after all, came the heavy blow. The theater had to give up. At the time that Ibsen had become artistic director, it had a debt of 1800 specie dollars. Later, by purchasing the house in which it played, and by making expensive improvements, it had acquired property worth about 14,000 specie dollars. At the same time the debt had increased to 28,000 specie-dollars, and the creditors pressed more and more relentlessly for money. In the summer of 1862 the theater had to give up its building to the bankruptcy court. All salaries had been reduced by one sixth at New Year, 1861, and now it was no longer possible to draw any salaries whatever. Directors and actors were discharged from June 1, 1862. The actors continued to play on their own responsibility, but Ibsen, left without his position, had no longer any source of income.

## Chapter Thirteen

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### DRAMA OF INDIGNATION LOVE'S COMEDY

THERE followed a period of want and privation such as Ibsen had experienced only during his first year in Oslo. For two years he had to struggle along from day to day without any assured income.

In March, 1862, he had hit upon the idea, or rather, his "Hollander" friends had suggested to him the idea, of applying to the University for some part of the appropriation set aside for travels of scholarly research within the country. His intention was to use two summer months in collecting folk songs and legends throughout the coast districts from Hardanger to Romsdalen, a work which fell in quite naturally with his national romantic writing. The application, therefore, was not at all unreasonable, and in the latter part of May he was granted 110 specie-dollars for his purpose, which he set out to accomplish the same summer. His route was somewhat changed from the original plan. He traveled up Gudbrandsdalen, over the mountains to Sogn, then northward to Romsdalen and thence back to Oslo, gathering his best harvest, especially of legends, at Nordfjord and Sunnmøre. He returned with plans to publish a collection of Norwegian legends, but never finished the work, and never printed more than four sample legends in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*. All of his notations have been lost. Still the journey was to have a visible effect on his writings. He had received fresh, new impressions of both nature and the life

of the people throughout the country, impressions which were revived and reanimated when he broke away from the restraint and compulsion of these years

For the present his problem was to be or not to be. He was fighting, at one and the same time, for his existence and his life work, and he *would* not yield. Though outwardly he might sink low under the pressure of poverty and discouragement, there was in his spirit an invincible determination to retrieve himself and conquer.

Immediately after his return from his summer journey, toward the close of August, he wrote two newspaper articles dealing with the "crisis" brought about at the Christiania Theater by the fact that the actors refused to do any chorus work. In one of these articles he admonished the actors to show a devotion ready to sacrifice personal considerations for art's sake. As he wrote of this, there burst from him an observation which gives a direct insight into the great problems with which he was himself confronted. He pointed out that all other artist groups had been forced to suffer want and hardships, and had often been compelled to flee from their country, yet they had not forsaken their duty or their art. In contrast to them the actors "have heretofore lacked the blessing of renunciation, a lack from which no one escapes with impunity. That man of ideas who is denied an opportunity to suffer or go hungry has thereby one less way of becoming great."

To himself it was indeed given to know the blessings of hunger and hardships. His spirit was tempered by it. As he closed his article, Ibsen reminded the actors of the Roman guard at Pompeii who, refusing to flee from the ash rain of Vesuvius until he should be relieved, died at his post. "Such a deed is the work of the spirit,

the revelation of that spirit which should rule in art as well as in the army or the Church " Ibsen, feeling that he stood at such a post, would remun under the falling ashes, certain that the will to do so would carry him and his work to greater heights than if he fled to "more comfortable working conditions "

Ibsen's lofty demands for sacrifice were met only with derision The newspaper writer with whom he had taken issue retorted by calling him "the sentimental and æsthetically unbalanced writer in *Nyhedsbladet*," assuming that nothing more was to be expected of "one whose brain was befogged by misapprehended ideas of beauty," and adding the deliberately ambiguous thrust that "it was presumably difficult to bring such a person to any sober reflection " *Morgenbladet* found the occasion opportune to recall that there were some theater directors who were lacking in "enterprise and industry "

Without answering the criticism, Ibsen bit his teeth together and showed now, at any rate, both enterprise and willingness to work He secured a position as theatrical reporter to *Morgenbladet* for a period of two or three months and contributed various minor writings to *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, legends, other reminiscences of his summer travels, and book announcements for Christmas There was little money in such journalism, and he sank deeper and deeper into debt, but he performed all his work with extreme care, and his reports of both plays and books are incisive and well reasoned, vigorous and temperate at the same time

He had a sense of standing alone in his work "The spirit of fault finding in our literary world" seemed to him much stronger than the critical sense, and he was irritated because the public, unwilling to hear of anything new or unusual, persisted in judging



everything according to old custom. Thus when Bjornson published *Sigurd Slembe*, Ibsen was compelled to write what was almost a defense of the new artistic form he employed. Yet the thing that irritated him most was the prevailing indifference with regard to the fundamental questions of art. It is quite characteristic that his outbursts in both the first and the last of his theatrical articles in *Morgenbladet*, September 11 and November 9, were directed against "indifferentism," the first one declaring that "it bodes worse than all violent attacks," and the other pouring his anger and scorn out upon the entire Norwegian people which thrives on national boasting but does nothing for the building up of true national values. "The Norwegians, of course, are a people of the future, that is, a people which for two reasons may sleep securely at the present time and may continue to sleep securely at every present time to come, first, because we have the historic assurance that our ancestors have done a warrantable day's work, and secondly, because we have a perfect inner assurance that our descendants will some day awaken to a great cause in the future."

The article indicates that Ibsen was turning wholly away from national romanticism, and, besides, that he had not the least faith in the volition of a crowd or a populace. Such volition was only discovered afterwards by writers of history. "Except as afterwards invented, the conscious guiding principle is never present in the general sentiment of the populace."

More important even than these observations is the vigorous anger of the author. It remains psychologically true that there is hope for a man as long as he retains the ability to become angry, and this ability Ibsen retained to the full. At this time his anger possessed him so strongly that he sought relief in writing, and

produced, during the same period, his first great drama of indignation, *Love's Comedy*

Once or twice before, anger had driven him to write. There was, for instance, the series of twelve sonnets—so halting in form—with which, in 1849, he had tried to spur Norwegians and Swedes to fight for Slesvig. The sonnets constitute a political castigation in rhyme, revealing how bitterly it pained Ibsen that his people remained indifferent to the call of duty and honor. Similar feelings of hatred toward all infidelity and pretense filled his writings for *The Man* in 1851, and found expression in the operatic satire, *Norma*. Later, in his constant demand for deeds instead of words, we notice an occasional sign of the same anger as an undercurrent to his admonitory writings. Again, it bursts into clear language in one or two national controversial poems of 1859. But it had never yet created in Ibsen real characters with lives of their own, and had never become a true source of dramatic inspiration to him.

That is what happened now. For a long time anger had smoldered deeply within him, as in a volcano which conceals a dangerous and secret fire. Quietly but surely, year after year, he had gathered fuel for the embers, shutting up in himself a glowing mass of wrath and scorn at the paltriness of the world. His anger was no longer simply an emotion among other emotions, it took possession of his entire mental life and gave birth to drama in which was indeed the blood of his heart and the life of his soul. *Love's Comedy* was the first warning outburst of the volcano which bore the name Henrik Ibsen.

For three or four years the subject had lain within him, clamoring for expression, and two years earlier, in 1860, at the time

when he had been most deeply discouraged and hopeless, he had managed to put it into some sort of form in the comedy, *Svanhild*. Now, in 1862, partly before, but more especially after his summer journey to the fjords and Møre, he set to work anew, and revised the play. By this time, nourished by the bitterness of the intervening years, it had reached maturity in his mind, and had attained the form of a true work of art and a true child of Ibsen.

We note with interest that in writing this first drama of contemporary life he felt the same hesitation between prose and verse as he did in the saga plays, and that here the outcome was the opposite of that in *The Vikings at Helgeland*. In *Love's Comedy* he discarded the original prose form and used verse.

To us the opposite procedure, of using verse for the past and prose for the present time, might seem more natural, but it was not so to Ibsen. For the chastisement of his contemporaries, verse seemed the natural medium. It would appear that at certain times in his life he wrote more easily in verse than in prose, and, upon investigating more closely, one finds that it is especially when he feels compelled to pour out the full vials of his wrath that he is moved to employ verse. 'At such times his fresh, creative imagination flows more freely and boldly, he seems to laugh between clenched teeth as he raises his sword to battle, its edge made keener by rhythm and rhyme, while sparks fly at his stroke. The joy of battle rises from his verse.

At no previous time had Ibsen's verse been so rich or so instinct with humor as it was in *Love's Comedy*. He flicked his whip to the left and to the right—at the Norwegianisms in Knud Knudsen's *Grammar* and at the people who a few years earlier had been carried away by Andreas Munch's *Lord William Russell*.

Much of the dialogue was almost epigrammatic, and several verses, as for instance the lines about "there runs through all our life a nemesis," or the words about those "who set, thro' all their labors the Ideal" were taken bodily into everyday speech, becoming proverbs which everybody used without any longer thinking of the source. The verse, too, was moulded to suit various types of speech, the merchant expressing himself in business style, the clerk in the language of the office, the preacher in a sermonizing tone, and the spinster in a strain of old maidenish romanticism. Thus the verse form helped to give each character sharper outlines, and to make more natural and dramatically more justifiable the irony with which each drew his own portrait.

Satire and indignation dominated the drama. And upon what subject were they turned? Writing in 1867 that in his comedy he "wielded the scourge as best he could upon loves and marriages," he used these words in plural on purpose, to indicate that it was not against love and marriage that he hurled his anathemas. He can hardly be said to have succeeded in making it clear how a life in love should express itself, for it could not be his intention to advocate that all who loved each other should, like Svanhild and Falk, deny themselves companionship, or that all marriage should rest on practical considerations instead of on love. But after all it was not the positive solution of the problem that he had in mind, rather he wished to attack freely whatever had enraged him, and at this time he threw himself with the full weight of his wrath upon the forms to which love was bound in the society about him.

He wanted to expose to the light of day the tyrant of convention which, subjecting personal emotions to its own domination,

deprived them of life. In ferociously gay caricatures he drew—with his old skill at caricature—lovers and married couples of the sort demanded and created by existing social conditions. Even the high spirited Svanhild who, like Hiordis in *The Vikings*, would gladly follow the man she loved and be a valkyrie urging him to action, became a victim of "the world," trodden underfoot as was her namesake, the saga queen, who was trampled under horses' hoofs, while Falk, the wild bird, could save himself only by fleeing to the mountain heights.

Ibsen's contemporaries immediately perceived that the fight which he thus entered upon was a continuation of that begun by Camilla Collett in her novel *The Governor's Daughters*, published in 1855. Tru Collett's book was a bitter arraignment of society, showing how life and marriage mercilessly crushed the love that grows naturally in a woman's heart. It was a picture of human suffering that must stir every warm hearted person to revolt and that certainly kindled Ibsen's interest and helped rouse him to battle.

There is revolt in *Love's Comedy* not only against the conventions of betrothal and marriage, but against all the spiritual restraint society imposes upon a free personal life. One could hardly imagine a man more reluctant than Ibsen to offend against the laws or customs of the community in which he lived. He was quite painfully anxious to be like other people in deportment and appearance. But all the more deeply he felt the constraint, and he now began to raise a revolt in his writings. There, at least, he was free and could be himself.

*Till now there was fever in every vein—  
There was vengeance, vengeance to wreak!*

In *Love's Comedy* he did wreak vengeance, attaining thereby a sense of liberation. He declared war on the "vulgar prophets of the Lie," and raised a battle cry which was later to become the slogan of all opposition to established custom. The conventions were to him "lies," and freedom was to be won by truth.

Complete liberation was not attained instantly, however. Again we meet in him the struggle between the æsthetic and the ethical views of life. In his poem *On the Fells* he had portrayed a man who was lost in æstheticism, now he gave in *Love's Comedy* a picture of one who, taking æstheticism as his starting point, could find no satisfaction in it, since his heart was too warm to be content with mere poetic art, and must find expression in deeds. Yet one is somewhat uncertain, after all, whether the ultimate victory goes to ethics or to æstheticism, for while we hear, indeed, that Falk burns his poems to go to "the day's duties" where "we are called to strive and to forego," his very calling is poetry. Living on the memory of a great experience of love, he is to turn this memory into song. Ennobled though the poet's calling may be, he has undeniably returned to his starting point: the song is more than its fruit, the blossom fairer than the apple.

*And what if I shattered my roaming bark,  
It was passing sweet to be roaming!*

Thus the final victory belongs to æstheticism, or rather to a romantic æsthetic idealism which is raised above the purely æsthetic viewpoint and has a vital content: the thought that happiness lies not in the attainment but in the incessant struggle—a thought which came to be permanently and vitally necessary to Ibsen.

*Love's Comedy* was thus given a dual meaning. Having begun

to work in a spirit of indignation, intending to strike a tremendous blow at habitual and dominant social hypocrisy, Ibsen found that his anger had released his creative powers, and that the persons of whom he wrote began to live independent lives within him, or one might rather say, outside of him. Therefore it happened that despite the irony with which he portrayed them they could almost without his volition turn against him and demand their own rights. The merchant, Guldstad, can summon wise and strong words to subdue the illusions of love, and warm words for a thing so prosaic as a marriage for money, and even the spiritually impoverished Pastor Strawman can arise to protest, with deep and genuine pathos, against the æsthetic judgment upon him. His depiction of what a home can be rises to a lyric beauty which has made it forever memorable.

Ibsen can thus say with Falk: "A twofold music in my breast I bear." He has created a genuine drama in which the opposing elements stand out clearly against each other, each in its own full right, in such a way that the reader or spectator sometimes feels uncertain as to where the author would place the greatest emphasis, or what is after all the intended significance of his work.

The uncertainty, indeed, is greatest toward the close, for though the conclusion, superficially viewed, shows clearly enough that Falk's great sorrow gives him a new basis for living, one feels in the outcome a crying discord. The poet cannot intend that "the world" should take Svanhild and separate the two lovers. The drama is sharpened at last into a torturing question to which it gives no answer: is it impossible to harmonize life and ideals?

With equal sharpness though in a bantering tone, the same contrast is expressed in a poem which Georg Brandes calls "the witty

est and the wisest" of all those that Ibsen has written, a sort of by-product of his work on *Love's Comedy*, entitled "Complications." Again we see how the thing we love is always transformed as we are about to grasp it, how reality is something quite other than the dream. But perhaps the disappointment was unnecessary?—"There might have been quite a nice ending to 't," albeit on conditions which seem impossible. The thought, however, persists in playing about a solution, and the poem, like the drama, has a questioning tone.

Perhaps the very fact that the drama gives no answer, forces the question even more insistently upon our attention, and it is a form of closing which Ibsen used later in his dramatic writing and of which he made almost a principle.

*I do but ask, my call is not to answer*

The method causes us to feel even more strongly than we could otherwise do, the burning indignation of the poem, for at least there can be no doubt that the author's thought is completely filled with the one desire to brand the lies of life. It is a work conceived in righteous anger—Ibsen's first great drama of indignation.

At the same time, the uncertainty which remains after reading the drama may be an evidence that the author was unable to bring his thought to a clear conclusion because he had not yet found a sure foothold in his own ground.

Considering these things, it is not strange if contemporary critics were uncertain how to take the new work. It was published as a supplement to *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* on New Year's Eve, 1862. The few newspaper reviews which came followed in February and March.



Ditmar Meidell, the editor of *Aftenbladet*, complained of the confused state of literature in the country during the last few years and regarded *Love's Comedy* as precisely a "sorry product of such literary fidgeting." After dancing about, in his various plays, from one pattern to another, Ibsen could not, thought Meidell, produce anything independent in his new book, which was apparently designed to meet the popular demand for something original and sensational. In order to give people what they wanted, the playwright "resorted to a wild striving for effect, which in order to reach its aim would not stop at the most grotesque and tasteless paradoxes." With a somewhat unexpected jump in thought Meidell comes to the conclusion that Ibsen should have returned to the old method of imitation, for "without possessing what is known as genius, he has a talent which leans strongly toward the technical and artistic. Being able with ease to adapt himself to good models, and possessing an ear for the music of language, he could become a writer of good taste." In this latest book Meidell found skill in verse and facility in rhyme beyond all reasonable bounds, and was forced to "lament the waste of fine powers."

Professor Monrad, the philosopher, who had once spoken well of *Cathline*, tried to analyze the drama in *Morgenbladet*. By philosophical proofs he showed that *Love's Comedy* could not rightly be called a comedy, since it was more properly a satire, and further that he was unable to find, either in its plot or in its conclusion, anything that made it properly a drama. Following his dialectics from Hegel, he hit upon the thought that Ibsen should really have combined with Björnson, for the two had exactly opposite

characteristics as authors, "and it seems that only when taken together will they form a complete and satisfactory whole"

If neither of these reviewers, though holding widely different premises, could reconcile themselves to Ibsen's new method of writing, they were even more taken aback by the content of the drama. The great mocker, Meidell, retold this content in every day, slightly comic turns of speech, intended to show the contrast between the ostentation of verse and the incidents of reality, drawing the highflown idealist Falk down among the petty bourgeoisie by constantly referring to him as "Heir Falch." Monrad, though of course more dignified, suggested that Ibsen might have intended Falk as a sort of Erasmus Montanus, and that even if he had not created his hero in this spirit, Falk had become "what is, artistically speaking, almost worse than anything else a thing between a buffoon and a martyr."

In reality neither Meidell nor Monrad, respectably moral as they were, could remain unfeeling to the smart of anger in *Love's Comedy*. Even though Meidell declared that the drama was "as to ethical content as well as to æsthetic plan and intention, a puzzle," he did not hesitate to tell the public that "the author must have intended an assault upon one of the most fundamental bases of social life." He wrote that the drama "proves all the way through that it is a modern taking up of arms against family life," and that it "makes the most intransigent attack upon that social institution which the philosophers have called the mother of the State, namely marriage." Rejecting all attempts to show that the author meant only to expose "the flaws of family life and its occasional perversion," he maintained that Ibsen "sets clearly out

to portray family life and marriage as the dark side of our existence, indeed as the source of all the suffering in the world, since marriage, in his opinion, kills true love between people and for ever closes their eyes to the ideals "

Monrad, having at one time felt confidence in Ibsen, was heartily sorry to see that he had entered "upon a precarious course, by the consequences of which a considerable poetic talent may easily be ruined, for to become the spokesman of the distracted and spiritually enervating practical skepticism of the times, must be regarded as poetic destruction, for which Ibsen is too good " The feeling, however, does not mitigate his judgment upon *Love's Comedy* The drama leads, says Monrad, to "a breach in ideas which is revolting to human feelings," and to a hopelessness which is indeed a "moral and æsthetic impossibility " Thus the book is condemned, both as philosophy and as drama "On the whole, the fundamental view of the piece, that love and marriage are irreconcilable, is not alone untrue and—in the higher sense—immoral, since it degrades both love and marriage, but also unæsthetic, as is indeed every view which represents ideals and reality as irreconcilable "

The same thought is expressed by the Danish critic, Dr C. Rosenberg, in *Dansk Maanedsskrift* for February, 1864 He, too, had a finished formula for the art of writing, to which *Love's Comedy* did not conform "The drama is founded on bitter indignation, a mood which is not poetic "

Ibsen was later to prove that genuine poetry could proceed from such indignation, but for the time being he stood alone Botten-Hansen, attempting a mild defense in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, repeated Heiberg's rule that in art there is no question of "what,"

only of "how", but the public cared nothing for such rules. It heard that the drama in question was of an "unseemly" or "immoral" character, and it turned away from a playwright of that sort.

"The book created," writes Ibsen four years later in his preface to the new edition published in Denmark, "a storm of protest, more violent and extensive than most books can boast of in a society where the preponderate majority as a rule regard literary matters as quite irrelevant." He considered it "a mistake to publish the book in *Norway*," and felt that he had better reason to be thankful for the criticism he received in Denmark.

As the Danish criticism came much later than the Norwegian, it could do nothing toward brightening for the author the first period after the book was published, and when the two Danish reviews came, they were really not much better than the Norwegian. The best was by Clemens Petersen, the great reviewer for *Lædrolandet* who in July, 1863, half filled a number of the paper with *Love's Comedy* but his conclusion was that the drama was "a failure." Though he had much to say in praise of the great skill in verse, he thought there was altogether too much of playing with rhyme, and not enough of relationship between rhyme and thought. The thought content itself he regarded as both obscure and untrue, and if he had a more liberal view of literary art than the Norwegian critics had, he, as well as they, knew down to the last dot what true literature should be, and especially he knew how Ibsen should write. Repeating what he had heard from Norway, that Ibsen worked well only when "guided by a recognized model," he found that all Ibsen's work, precisely because it was full of contrasts, really "lacked individuality." Ibsen had

"a soft, fine, wholly theoretic nature," and therefore he easily became "vacillating and fantastical" when thrown upon his own resources. Clemens Petersen was of the opinion that Ibsen was largely to blame for this, because he had not "understood how to place his talents and work in the right relationship to"—Bjørn stjerne Bjornson. It seemed to him that Ibsen's striving had the purpose of competing with Bjornson, sometimes by attempting to ape him, and at other times by behaving in an exactly opposite manner, while the right procedure for Ibsen, "who possessed a fine eye for the model and a rich talent for continuing where others had left off," was to accompany Bjornson and assist toward the inclusion of the old within the new, when the great and true king of poets became too boldly impetuous.

It was not to such work that Ibsen intended to devote himself, and in a letter to Petersen he protested that he had never imitated Bjornson, or written out of consideration for anyone but himself. Yet he was glad that his book had thus been brought before the Danish public. The review proved to have little influence, and it is doubtful if a single copy was sold in Denmark, but he was grateful for the kind words that had been given him, and glad that Petersen, among other things, had found occasion to praise *Lady Inger of Östråt*. The praise was beneficial to Ibsen, in a greater degree than Petersen could imagine, since he did not know "in what a terrible degree I am intellectually alone up here."

He felt that in his own country he was left out. "The reception, for that matter, did not surprise me," he wrote in 1867, but if this had been true the general disapproval could hardly have affected him as it did. The condemnation of the book was hard upon his personal standing also, for, as one might expect in a city

as small as the Christiania of that day, it created considerable gossip that a married man wrote in this manner about marriage. "My personal concerns," he wrote in 1870, "were drawn into the discussion, and I lost much of general esteem. The only one who approved the book at that time was my wife." Otherwise he stood alone. "I was excommunicated, everyone was against me." Thinking especially of this period after *Love's Comedy*, he recalled, in a letter sent home from abroad three years later, a time when "standing in the midst of the clammy crowd, I felt their evil smiles behind me." Those were bad days.

At the time the drama was written he had hopes that it would be played at the Christiania Theater. But the general condemnation was too strong, and the play was laid aside. He had no opportunity to see what degree of success it might have had on the stage. It was like having the weapons struck out of his hands.

### FAITH AND DOUBT *THE PRETENDERS*

ONE victory at least Ibsen had helped to win during these years the stage had been conquered for Norway. It is true, Ibsen could not personally claim much credit for the new style in dramatic presentation which broke through the old accepted hidebound formulas and made fidelity to life its highest law. It was Björnson and the whole array of young Norwegian actors who created and put into practice the new form. Yet Ibsen, too, had dreamed of such a change, and even though he had not possessed enough of personal boldness in his work as instructor to guide and prod his actors in the new ways, he had supported the movement by his controversial articles, and even more by his plays.

After 1850, when the Norwegian theaters had been founded in Bergen and Oslo, the old Danish Christiania Theater had taken more and more Norwegian actors into its service, and after the famous pitched battle at the theater which Björnson had brought about in 1856, no new Danish actors were engaged, while the old ones gradually moved away. Further, when the Christiania Norwegian Theater was forced to close in 1862, a plan for transferring all its actors to the Christiania Theater was seriously considered, and at the same time as negotiations for such concerted action started, the Danish director, Carl Borgaard, was discharged. Be-

ginning at New Year, 1863, a directorate of five men had charge of the theater, and Ibsen was appointed literary advisor

The change indicated a complete new program, and when the actors from the Norwegian Theater finally, half a year later, moved in a body from Møllergata to Bankpladsen, the Christiania Theater could no longer be regarded as Danish. Of forty actors only six were Danish, and the Norwegians were artistically foremost. With the group of distinguished artists on the boards, there was indeed a basis for a genuinely Norwegian theater, and upon Bjørnson's taking over the management at New Year, 1865, there followed a period of glory for Norwegian theatrical art, such as a country but rarely experiences. Here was a theater ready to produce the new writings of both Ibsen and Bjørnson, and the two in return created a drama which led the art of acting farther and farther along new lines toward sincere and deeply personal character portrayal.

Ibsen, being limited to the position of literary advisor for more than a year during the period of transition, had little opportunity to direct the new tendencies that now were uppermost, and to his personal affairs the work at the Christiania Theater gave little of economic stability. He was engaged at a salary of twenty five specie-dollars per month, but as all the salaries at the theater had to conform to the total income for the month, neither Ibsen nor the actors were ever given full pay.

It was not easy for him to make both ends meet. In an application to the Government on March 10, 1863, he stated that he had a debt of 500 specie-dollars, a sum which might not seem large but which covered living expenses for an entire year. Ibsen had no property to balance the debt, and he was undoubtedly com-



pelled to pay high interest, as he had to resort to private money lenders who were often plain usurers. One of his professional helpers at this time was later portrayed in *A Doll's House*. It was inevitable that as time went on he must sink deeper into debt.

Upon attaching himself to the Christiania Theater he had been compelled to discontinue dramatic reporting for *Morgenbladet*, and the two or three reviews which he still wrote for *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* could not bring in much. Aside from these incidental jobs, he had two larger undertakings in hand during the winter of 1862-63. In November he had entered upon an agreement with the bookseller, Johan Dahl, to publish a collection of Norwegian legends, a book of at least 250 pages, intended to supplant the old collection by Faye. This work was never completed by Ibsen, but was taken up by Ludvig Daae after him. Nor did his other work, the preparing a collection of his poems, meet with better success. His method of procedure can be followed somewhat in the sample poems that were printed in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* immediately after New Year, 1863, but no collection was finished for publication.

Such uncompleted attempts seem to indicate another period of despondency. The dualism in *Love's Comedy* is clearly a sign of conflict within his own soul, but the will to win was still the strongest element in him.

I am fairly sure that this was the time when he discarded the long series of poems written in 1859 called "In the Picture Gallery." At least he began at this time to select parts of the series as matter for independent poems. And I believe that this work indicates his state of mind during the period, for "In the Picture Gallery" as originally written was—with the exception of the

very first poem that we have from his hand, "Resignation"—the most discouraged, doubt tortured thing he ever penned. He could no longer own this sort of thing as an expression of his inner life.

At this time, also, he revised the most personal of all his poems from the *Andhrimner* days, "The Minei," trying to give its language a richer, more sonorous tone, and making one change which gave a new aspect to the fundamental idea of the poem. Formerly the last stanza read

*Thus he hammers, blow on blow,  
Till in weariness laid low—*

lines in which we hear the tone of surrender and see a man who sinks wearily under the burden of life. In 1863 Ibsen replaced the lines with

*Hammer blow on hammer blow  
Till the lamp of life is low*

Weariness has been forced aside by a stubborn determination to endure, to struggle to the very end of life even if there is no hope of victory, and the poem closes with

*Not a ray of hope's fore warning,  
Not a glimmer of the morning*

The same mood and the same determination are powerfully expressed by Gustaf Fröding in his "Hydra" poem, in which he describes how the poet must accept popular acclaim while he transforms his own suffering into poetry, or even while he fights against insanity. Still he fights

*yet I shall not surrender*

The words echo Ibsen's spirit. He would lose his self respect if he gave up. The struggle was life itself to him.

Yet his soul was filled with dread The poem "With a Water Lily," containing a warning against the danger of prolonged self-contemplation, belongs to this time

*Child, beware the tarn-fed stream,  
Danger, danger, there to dream!  
Though the sprite pretends to sleep,  
And above the lilies peep*

From "In the Picture Gallery" he detached the poem "The Daylight Coward," describing his fear of the "trolls of daylight" and the "busy life" He is brave, he is truly himself, only when he hides under the cover of night Ibsen adds to the poem at this time the last stanza, which contains a prophecy

*Yes, if ever I boast an achievement,  
'Twill sure be a deed of night*

He felt like an outlaw, afraid lest he should indeed be stranded The whole slimy *boyg* of society was against him, and the sensation was enough to destroy a man's courage

It seems curious that during the year 1863 Ibsen was again willing to write all sorts of occasional poems, especially for the Students' Association In six years, from the time he moved to Oslo in the fall of 1857 up to the fall of 1863, he wrote, altogether, forty poems for special occasions, by arrangement, or upon encouragement from others No less than twenty six of the forty were written during the first three years of this period Especially between the summer of 1859 and the summer of 1860 he had been a productive festival poet, writing during this one year seventeen such poems, almost one half of the entire number During this year he had more of aggressive courage than at any other period of his stay in Oslo Later he had been more un

willing to supply such verses, writing only four during the entire year of 1861 and three during the summer of 1862. The double reason for this was that he was reluctant to work at writing, and that he wished to center his efforts on his own work. What, then, could be the reason for his new and sudden generosity in the matter of festival poems? Between New Year and the fall of 1863 he wrote no less than seven.

Partly the answer is no doubt that he was not ready to begin another large piece of work immediately upon finishing *Love's Comedy*, but also, I believe, that he was actually glad at this time when someone cared to invite him, and when he was permitted to enjoy the society of other people on festive occasions.

Furthermore, a new tone rings through this new festival verse. Formerly, almost innumerable times, he had written about memories from the distant past, recalling them to his people as encouragement and inspiration. Having, more than any other national festival writer, a gift for this sort of thing, he had become the great singer of national romanticism.

Now he turned sharply and abruptly against memorial celebrations, and the first occasional poem of 1863, written for a festival in honor of the forefathers on January 13, takes up the idea of his last article in *Morgenbladet*, where for the first time he throws down the gauntlet to national romanticism. Instead of being a song of joy the poem became an angry complaint:

*We slept our time away, and small,  
We dreamed of our own glory,  
Till mists broke in the morning wind,  
And day told its new story*

a literary stipend to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the intention being, wrote Riddervold, the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, to assist the author so that "his development may be freer and the work on his own writings more finished" The Minister found it "both desirable, and worthy of the nation" to give this support to "excellent talent" The request was granted on April 10 by a large majority vote of the Storting, allowing to Bjørnson the same annual sum which had three years earlier been given as a stipend to the poet Andreas Munch

Now, on March 10, Ibsen had sent application to the Government for a poet's stipend for himself, that he might be "enabled to continue his literary activity" He related the events of his hard working life, and told how his labor had resulted in debt and difficulties, adding that since he no longer had any hope of better living conditions in Norway, he could think of nothing to do but to move abroad, to Denmark Remembering what he had written about the actors half a year earlier, one realizes the suffering and discouragement from which the thought arose, and at the close one hears suddenly a half suppressed cry in the application which is otherwise most sober and business like "To leave my country and give up a work which I have so far regarded and still regard as my true calling, is a step which seems unutterably hard to take, and it is in order to avoid it, if possible, that I am trying this last means"

The cry was completely suppressed by the Church Department, the old Minister Riddervold feeling that the country could not support an author who scoffed at the holy state of marriage, and being indignant because the dramatist had held up to ridicule the ecclesiastics to whom he had now been lord and father

for fifteen years. People thought that Pastor Strawman in *Love's Comedy* was intended as a caricature of the type of clergyman that Riddervold approved. On March 18, therefore, the Department announced that, although it might have been desirable to give Ibsen some assistance, there was not "in this instance the same occasion for making such a provision as there had been at the presentation of the gracious proposal of a contribution to the poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson." Consequently there was an order in council that in the case of Ibsen "no action be taken."

While the Storting was considering the stipend for Bjørnson on April 10, one of the leading liberal members, Judge Rolf Olsen, brought a motion that Ibsen be given similar support, but with a majority of forty nine against forty votes the Storting decided to lay the matter indefinitely on the table. Thus the Storting adopted toward Ibsen the same attitude as had the Church Department.

One hope, however, the Department gave him. Recalling how he had been passed over when Bjørnson and Vinje received their stipends for foreign travel in 1860, it suggested that he might probably "be considered" when the next appropriation was made in the fall of the year.

This was a ray of light. At the same time (March 6) he had applied to the University for a new stipend to be used in collecting folk legends, intending this time to go to Nordmore and the coast districts of Trøndelag, possibly even to Nordland. The application was answered two months later, May 23, by an appropriation of 100 specie-dollars for the purpose specified—ten dollars less, it is true, than he had received last time, but money, for

all that Immediately after, May 27, he wrote an application to the Government for a travel stipend, this time venturing to place the sum as high as 600 specie-dollars and specifying that he wished to use the money for the "study of art and art history, and for the study of literature," preferably in Rome and Paris, and that he wished to spend an entire year in such study with the purpose—he now dared to state—of gaining a "liberal education" for the work of authorship

The mere hope of finding opportunity for such travel kindled new courage in him, and poems and dramas began anew to grow in his mind At this time he again began to think of the subject which he had considered five years earlier, before the problem of *Love's Comedy* absorbed his interest, the subject of Earl Skule's revolt during the civil wars of Norway

One can readily see what attracted him to Skule He saw a rich talent without opportunity to express itself, and he felt how the man was consumed by doubt and longing He seemed to see his own life reflected therein This he remembered in 1870 when, writing to a friend, he reviewed his life as an author "The fact that everyone was against me, that I no longer had anyone outside the nearest of whom I could say that he believed in me, must, as you will readily see, call forth a mood which found release in *The Pretenders*" Ibsen was engaged in struggle, both inwardly and against outward circumstance

Yet it is not mere chance that in May, 1863, he wrote two occasional poems which with especial strength proclaim a truce in the struggle, and which seem to prophesy victory for other powers than those which contended in Earl Skule Varying thoughts were at the time struggling for mastery in Ibsen's own mind in

such a way that he could not give clarity and form to his subject. For a time he was unable to set pen to paper in the work on his new drama.

Then there occurred suddenly an event which brought him light and gathered all his visions into a clear, strong picture.

The students invited him to go with them on a festive journey to Bergen, to a great choral fête which would bring at least a thousand singers from Oslo and from other cities in all parts of Norway. Ibsen, hungering for festivity, accepted the invitation and wrote a song which the three choral groups in Oslo learned for the occasion. It was entitled "Hail Song!" and had as its subject matter the thought which most completely occupied Ibsen's own mind, the idea of drawing together in harmony coast dwellers and northerners, Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes—an idea which is in vital accord with the dramatic subject from the period of the civil wars that he was then turning over in his mind.

The group of singers left Oslo on June 12 and arrived in Bergen on Sunday, June 14. The very voyage imparted to Ibsen a festive mood and gave occasion for poetry. Their sailing seemed to him like that of Sunday pleasure seekers, and he imagined even the island dweller, who listened to their songs as they passed, to be filled with the emotions that inspired himself.

*He is not far from God*

*With flying banners we speed along  
We are free as birds in the air,  
He's left behind, but he hears our song—  
"Some great thing is passing there!"*



Even during the journey there seemed to penetrate his soul seeds that would "grow in the hungry earth," and the promise of the journey was fulfilled during the three festive days that followed in Bergen.

There had been some difficulty in finding lodging for Ibsen during these days, for it was known that he had somewhat lost caste in Christiania, but it was finally arranged that he should stay with the ship-owner, Randolph Nilsen, together with a friend who was a cousin of the lady of the house. The visit was entirely comfortable and happy. Returning to Oslo, he immediately wrote a warm letter of thanks for "the indescribable kindness and good will" which had been shown him. "God be praised," he wrote, "I still carry the festive mood within me and hope that I may long retain it.—The festivities there, and the many dear, ever memorable people whom I met, affect me as a salutary church going, and I firmly hope that the mood will not depart. Everyone was kind to me in Bergen, it is not so here, where many try to grieve and pain me on every occasion." He had met with friendliness and good will which had brought healing to his wounded spirit, and which he felt to be "the most deeply beneficent effect of the festival", "a strong elevating impulse, through which one feels that all one's thoughts are ennobled and purified." His sky was clearing and brightening.

The very crown of the festival, to Ibsen, was Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. He had just returned from a three year trip abroad, and was full of ambitious desire for great undertakings. He wrote to a Danish friend that his "homecoming was dreary", he felt that he met only prosaic thoughts of material gain, while in all matters of great intellectual or social import there prevailed "an

indescribable lethargy " But he did not mean to let this turn him from his course, he was determined to bend all his energies toward stirring up life Now he was in Bergen for a time, and attended the song festival as a matter of course, speaking, creating strife—surrounded, as usual, by storms, but at the same time charming people and carrying them away with his enthusiasm

He greeted Ibsen as a friend and brother in arms In fact he had various things to thank Ibsen for from the years that he had been away Ibsen had produced both his *King Sverre* and his *Lone Hulda* at the Christiania Norwegian Theater, and had been the first to point out to Norwegian readers the splendid art which was evident in *Sigurd Slembe* In return, Björnson now gave all the rich warmth of his own heart, and no man could radiate a more genial warmth than Björnson when he met a friend Perfectly aware that people looked upon him and Ibsen as rivals, he made an effort to remove all traces of such relation

He took Ibsen by storm Never in his life, before or after, did Ibsen yield himself so completely and unresistingly to any man as he now did to Björnson All the pain and grief of his heart seemed to dissolve, from the mouth of a friend he heard all the great things which he himself had concealed within his inmost dreams, faith and enthusiasm set his spirit aflame All at once he knew that he could achieve He was no longer sick He was strong and courageous

Something of what passed between them may be gathered from the official reports of the festival Björnson's reference—in a speech on the subject of a national Bergen—to Hakon Håkonnsson, "Norway's best king" and the promoter of union, must

have touched upon some of Ibsen's strongest interests, and, at the great banquet on June 16, Björnson discussed directly the relation between himself and Ibsen. Speaking of the nation's need for song, the need for overcoming by means of song all tendencies to strife and disagreement, he pointed out how sometimes one poet might even be used as a weapon against another. "Have I not experienced that my friend Ibsen has been placed over against me for the purpose of disparaging me, and I against him, to disparage him?" Instead of this attitude we must have reconciliation and union, and to the attainment of these, song must be an aid. The speech was followed by the song which Ibsen had written for the occasion, an incident in which the two poets seemed to clasp hands before all the world.

By June 21 Ibsen was back in Oslo. The new drama now suddenly stood strongly and clearly before his mind, and he must write it. He could not put it off. Though he drew the money which the University appropriated for the purpose of collecting legends, he could not set out. He cheated the University out of a hundred dollars, but he gave to his people a masterpiece, *The Pretenders*.

The subject of the drama is the struggle for union in Norway. Politically this struggle came to an end when Håkon Håkonsson conquered the last rebellious pretender to the throne, Skule Bardsson, in 1240. But ever since, even down to our own times, the question has been vital in the popular mind. Is the union to be anything beyond a political measure, anything over and above a form of government? Is it to be a power in the lives of the people, drawing them together in truly national accord?

With the skill of genius, Ibsen has succeeded in carrying this

question back to the period of conflict in the thirteenth century, and in so doing has made the drama not merely historical but a living contribution to the contemporary struggle, rousing and stimulating the people of today. The words which he places in the mouth of King Håkon have become a slogan and a battle cry among us. "Norway has been a kingdom, it shall become a people. The Trønder has stood against the man of Viken, the Agde man against the Hordalander, the Halogalander against the Sogndalesman, all shall be one hereafter, and all shall feel and know that they are one!" Ibsen has made this the great "king's-thought" in our history and in the life of our people. It is this great idea about which they are contending, King Håkon and Earl Skule. In the portrayal of the two Ibsen has given his very life blood, particularly in Skule, who carries the battle within himself.

Hakon was called of God, and his strength lay in the sure belief that this was so. His path lay straight ahead of him, even as his thought was straightforward and clear. There were no secret corners in his mind, no problems of the soul. He was all of one piece and therefore a chieftain.

Skule was altogether different. The last words of the drama solve his riddle, he "was God's stepchild on earth." Only a new riddle, someone has said, but one which gathers into a single phrase what all the rest of the drama has already shown. God's love was not with Skule, and he did not follow God's call to him, except in the last hour, when he gave his life for Håkon's "king's-thought," when he confirmed what his skald had said to him. "A man can die for another's life work, but if he go on living, he must live for his own." Therefore Skule could never

be fortunate, could never be the great, natural chieftain. It is the mystery of life that "the most fortunate man is the greatest man. It is the most fortunate man that does the greatest deeds—he whom the cravings of his time seize like a passion, begetting thoughts he himself cannot fathom, and pointing to paths which lead he knows not whither, but which he follows and must follow till he hears the people shout for joy, and looking around him with wondering eyes, finds that he has done a mighty deed." Skule has "wisdom and courage and all noble gifts of the mind," but he has not genius, for he has not the call of God.

Mysticism then, after all? Yes, in the sense that all religion is mysticism. For in Ibsen this is religion—not merely a part of one or another set of dogmas, not merely a philosophic conclusion from his own brain, but a vital power in which he believes. Quite involuntarily he feels that the talents which he possesses and the work to which they impel him are a gift from higher powers, powers which govern the world, and which impose obligations that a man is compelled to accept if he would answer for the gift. To him the obligations are a categorical imperative, an ethical demand so strict as to become religious, a command from God—a "call."

In *The Pretenders* we meet, more acutely presented than ever before, a problem which had burned in Ibsen as far back as we can follow his writings, the problem of a man's calling and of his faith in his calling. The question is raised in the first poem we have from him, written in 1847: had he himself a calling or had he not? "Did I wrongly then aspire?" It is the question which burns in Catiline. In one moment he, too, believes that he has a calling.

*I must! I must! A voice deep in my soul  
Urges me on, and I will heed its call*

But at another time he declares with equal force that he has no faith, and that he must run away from his calling

*My fate has willed it so It must so be!*

The same soul struggle had been present in Lady Inger—the everlasting struggle between faith and doubt

The new element in *The Pretenders* is the fact that Ibsen for the first time places over against the doubter a man who fully and immovably believes in his calling, and we may say that it was Bjornson who had helped him to create such a man Bjornson's faith had gone into King Håkon Ibsen had seen this element of faith in Bjornson before, and had envied him a little, at the same time as he felt some contempt for the childishness of such a faith Now, having been conquered by the charm of Bjornson and his faith, and feeling the greatness of this very childishness, he gave it life in Håkon

Thus Håkon in *The Pretenders* is in one sense a reflection of Bjornson, though he has something of Ibsen as well, namely, the faith which is ever present in the depths of his soul, but which most often conquers only after an agonizing struggle The fact that Ibsen drew his own mother in the mother of Håkon may be a sign of his feeling that he himself had a part in Håkon It is certain that he would not wholly identify himself with the contrasting character, Skule, who would steal the "king's thought" from its rightful owner, and parade in the greatness of another No—that was not Ibsen He knew that the "king's-thought" had always lived in him as a mighty ideal which filled his soul,

and that he had no need of borrowing or stealing a life work. He could live for his own.

Yet there is more of Ibsen in Earl Skule than in any other person in the drama. Cut out of Ibsen himself and out of the anguish of his experiences is the doubt which tortures and sears the mind of Skule, making him soul sick and confused, involving him in wrongdoing, and causing him to ponder even greater wrongdoing—a struggle which makes Skule and his experience the central thing in the drama. By expressing the whole of his mental struggle in an imaginative work, Ibsen has written it out of and away from himself, and has thus conquered it. He might have reached the state, as he puts it in *The Pretenders*—borrowing a phrase of Vinje's from *The Man*—of him "who doubts of his own doubt." But he felt instinctively that at such a point a man becomes an "unsound doubter," and that he would and must tear himself away from such sickly thoughts. In *The Pretenders*, he won the victory.

Thus the play goes far beyond the great national question of popular union, and becomes a drama of conflict between deep spiritual powers in the life of man. Everything is gathered into the contrast between Håkon and Skule, at the same time as it is concentrated within the one man, Skule, who understands greatness even while he struggles against it.

Everything and everybody in the drama serves the one purpose of throwing light upon this deep conflict. First in importance for the purpose is the man who may be called the third leading character in the play, Bishop Nicholas. He seems to be part of the soul of Skule detached and made into a character by itself,

giving form and life to the doubt that gnaws at Skule's heart, drawing him into dark and wild thoughts. At the same time he is the national devil, always scheming to divide the people, to split it with petty wrangling—the dreary *perpetuum mobile* of our history. He appears almost as a spirit, a bodiless controlling power in the dramatic struggle, and it is not surprising, therefore, that even after death he returns as a ghost, still trying to carry on his work.

Yet he, too, is given a human explanation, and is dowered with a trait from Ibsen's own soul: he is *afraid*. Since his very boyhood, he has longed for great achievement, but when the opportunity comes, he flees. Though he tries time and again, he can never conquer his fear. This weakness, too, Ibsen had felt and winced under, wishing earnestly to be brave, but finding that in association with other people he shrank within himself, and that it was only in his dreams he fought great battles. Conscious within himself of what this fear might lead to, he portrayed the consequences in Bishop Nicholas: ill will and hatred against all who raised their heads higher than his own. "Here shall no giant be, for I was never a giant."

On the other hand there is an element which is equally a part of Ibsen's own nature: an endless longing and thirst after love and good will. This he gives form in the character of a woman, Margrete, who stands between her father, Skule, and her husband, Håkon, used by both as a means to political ends, while she herself desires only love, and suffers more than anyone else in the conflict.

One by one the characters in the play are thus born out of Ibsen's own mood, even while each of them has a firm historic



basis Some small account in the historical work of P A Munch has given a suggestion for the loving nature of Margrete, and similarly each of the others—Bishop Nicholas, King Håkon, Earl Skule—is built up on historical records Some difference in interpretation there may be, since all three of the leading characters have been subjects for dispute among historical scholars, and Ibsen, going beyond the records of history, has carried their thoughts and wills to greater lengths than the historical sources give him the right to do But the poetic right is there, for Ibsen brought these people into our own struggles And yet he has taken a firm grip on historic traits, and his characters stand illumined by the light of history

The dramatic conflict between the characters, too, is straight forward and clear, idea against idea, man against man There is no tangled intrigue of tricks within tricks

In *Lady Inger of Östråt* Ibsen follows a method which he had learned from Scribe, of building the drama around the struggle to hide or reveal a carefully guarded secret upon which rests the entire outcome of the play Later, too, Ibsen, retaining something of the technique he had thus learned, often uses the old secret sin as a bomb to uncover the true characters of his persons There is an old secret of this sort even in *The Pretenders*, but here it is not revealed, and therefore it helps to keep doubt alive in Earl Skule, without being itself a main part of the dramatic action

This time one may say that Ibsen has succeeded in fulfilling all the requirements that Hermann Hettner had made of the truly great historical drama, and I doubt whether one can find in all literature a more forceful drama than *The Pretenders*—

deeper in psychological analysis, greater in thought, clearer and firmer in structure. It seems to me close to perfection. It is in a class with Shakespeare.

Like Ibsen's first saga play, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, this too is written in prose, but in a style which, though it retains a suggestion of the saga, differs from the older play in that it makes not the slightest attempt to conform to the saga language or to create in the public an illusion by means of affected historic archaism. The language is standard, current speech, slightly and naturally colored by knowledge of and familiarity with the old sagas.

There can be no doubt that Bjornson helped Ibsen in the discovery of the new form, which may have appealed to Ibsen as the proper style for a Norwegian historical drama even as early as on the October evening in 1857 when, immediately after the completion of *The Vikings*, the two sat together in the Christiania Theater and saw Bjornson's *Between the Battles* go across the boards for the first time. Later the presentation of *King Sverre* at his own theater in 1861 gave him new occasion to consider the matter, and the following year, reviewing a book by his old schoolmate, Frithjof Toss, who attempted to copy this style, Ibsen gave clear expression to his view of the advantages of the Bjornson prose. While admitting here that Bjornson was "the first writer to avail himself of it," he maintains that this artistic form "has previously lain as an unspoken wish in our people and as a completely satisfying expression of the present conception of nationality." Perceiving clearly the distinguishing qualities of Bjornson's style, he says that "its character rests on the fact that it has the saga as its groundwork," a statement which

he had opportunity to explain fully a week later, in reviewing *Sigurd Slembe* "The tone of the language," he here points out, "is not the tone of the saga, nor should it be " But, he adds, "if anyone should think of offering this as a criticism, we would bid him consider that a marked use of the language of any historic period would be a mistake where the writer, as in this case, has chosen to represent an unchanging and always equally comprehensible spiritual struggle A work written in such intention has nothing to do with dates and timeliness "

On this theory, then, is based the style of *The Pretenders*, and it is practically self evident that the form must be prose While Ibsen was busily at work on this drama, Clemens Petersen's review of *Love's Comedy* appeared with the dictatorial statement "Verse is Henrik Ibsen's nature, and as a writer he can hardly be natural apart from it " To this Ibsen replied, in his letter of thanks a month later, that he had to write his new drama in prose "I cannot write it in verse " The style would not seem natural to him except in prose form

In *Love's Comedy* verse had served naturally as an opportunity for phrases and turns of thought which went outside of what might properly belong to the conversation of his characters, giving greater freedom to satire Something of the same tendency to gather the thought into pithy, vigorous aphorisms is evident in *The Pretenders* as well, making the play unusually rich in concise speeches which are easily retained by the popular memory It is a not infrequent result of the method, however, that the author speaks too freely on his own account, as for instance when he lets a woman in a moment of heavy sorrow retain enough power of reflection to formulate the following

piece of wisdom "To love, to sacrifice all, and be forgotten, that is woman's saga "

At one point in *The Pretenders*, in the scene in which the ghost of Bishop Nicholas returns to urge Earl Skule into the cause of Bagler politics, Ibsen *wishes* to speak on his own account, and therefore employs verse. The ghost scene itself is justified by the fact that Nicholas, being but a part of the personality of Skule, gives expression to the impulses that stir within the pretender king—the temptation and the victory over himself. But the poet, being unable to refrain from going beyond the dramatic purpose, finds his excuse in the verse form, even while he half ironically lets Skule tease the bishop about the new mode of speech "And it seems you have learnt skald craft, old Bagler chieftain!" If Ibsen has thus sinned against his own artistic demands, he has at least triumphed in the sense that hardly any thing else he has written is so frequently quoted as these closing verses

*While to their life-work Norsemen set out  
Will lessly wavering, daunted with doubt,  
While hearts are shrunken, minds helplessly shivering,  
Weak as a willow-wand wind swept and quivering—  
While about one thing alone they're united,  
Namely, that greatness be stoned and despited—  
When they seek honor in fleeing and falling  
Under the banner of baseness unfurled—  
Then Bishop Nicholas 'tends to his calling,  
The Bagler Bishop's at work in the world!*

We are suddenly aware here of a new source of inspiration for this remarkably rich drama, namely, Ibsen's hot indignation

over the general lack of will power and manliness in his country men, and if we have not understood it before, it is at least clear at this point that this national historic drama has not the least connection with national romanticism in the ordinary sense of that word. It is a work which points forward, not back, and which places high moral requirements on the people as well as on the individual.

While Ibsen was most energetically at work upon this drama he had the great pleasure of seeing that his friend Botten Hansen attempted to give a complete account of him to the Norwegian people. In *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* for July 19, 1863, between two numbers devoted to an account of "the Dalesman," as A. O. Vinje was called, appeared the first printed biography of Henrik Ibsen. For the first time people heard something of his hard struggle to exist and do his life work, and were enabled to see his writings in their proper sequence. Of his dramatic works the biographer says "A keen perception of and interest in special psychic developments, a talent for combining elements for the complication of the plot, an open eye for dramatic situations, a critical serenity and deliberation to clip the wings of lyric impulse, and an insight, based on long experience, into the requirements of the stage—are so many favorable conditions for his dramatic production." But then Botten Hansen adds, and the words are somewhat remarkable from the mouth of so close a friend "And if he possessed in the same degree ideal faith and conviction, he would be able to give us dramatic productions of the highest order."

It may be true that there was a lack of "faith" in *Love's Comedy*, but whoever knew Ibsen must also have known that

the anger which shot its flame so high in the play was born of an idealism which was too highly pitched rather than too low. In any case, *The Pretenders* was to give unmistakable proof that to a greater degree than the majority he possessed "ideal faith and conviction."

The drama was written almost in a frenzy, and Ibsen had neither time nor thought for anything else before it was finished. In less than two months he had it on paper and had for the most part completed his work on it, as we may safely assume from the fact that on August 13, 1863, seven weeks after his return from Bergen, he could break away from it long enough to go to the theater. What he saw there was another historical drama with a subject from the period of the civil wars, *Eystein Meila*, by the young writer, Kristian Elster. Reviewing it in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, he butchered it without mercy, revealing at the same time his own requirements for a national historic drama and his complete assurance that he would fulfill them: a strong content of thought, and everything brought together into a firm dramatic knot. "It is not by works of this sort that our dramatic literature will be enriched," he writes of *Eystein Meila*, knowing within himself that he had just created a work which would add a new treasure to our literature.

He had been encouraged during his work by the simultaneous appearance of Clemens Petersen's long review of *Love's Comedy* (July 18) and the biographical sketch by Botten Hansen in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* (July 19). A month later (August 18) he wrote to thank Petersen for his review, and added "I am working on an historical drama in five acts." We may be sure



HENRIK IBSEN

*From a print in Illustreret Nyhedsblad for July 19 1863  
illustrating the first article on Ibsen that ever appeared*





that by this time he had only the finishing touches left to complete

During the first days in September a clear copy of the book was made, and on one of these days, walking down the street with his manuscript under his arm, presumably on his way to the theater with it, he met the greatest bookseller in Christiania, old Johan Dahl. He told Dahl about his new play and asked him to undertake the publishing of it. Dahl agreed immediately, promising a royalty of 150 specie-dollars, an unusually large sum for those days. He took the manuscript with him and began printing without delay. The written agreement was made on September 15, and late in October the book was offered for sale.

It created no sensation at first. The Norwegian reading public was small, and the demand was not clamorous, it took six to seven years to sell a thousand copies. The first review that appeared, in *Aftenbladet* for November 18, praised the excellent dramatic structure of the play, but lost itself in criticism of the too strong effects, the reviewer showing clearly that he had understood nothing of the psychological problem. This, however, Professor Monrad had caught, and in January, 1864, he wrote three long articles about the play, in *Morgenbladet*, explaining what an excellent character tragedy this was, and regretting only that it was not in verse. In February Dr. C. Rosenberg praised the play in the same manner in *Dansk Maanedsskrift*. To him it was the greatest testimony of the entire forward movement in Norwegian dramatic literature, and he found in it a new psychology and a new art of dialogue. Comparing *The Pretenders* with the drama on the same subject which Andreas Munch had

recently published, *Earl Skule*, he had to note how the latter kept to the beaten tracks of the older Danish drama, as well as how shallow *Earl Skule* was when compared with *The Pretenders*. It seemed to be a clear competition between old and new dramatic art, and from this moment it must be evident to everyone that Ibsen had sailed far ahead.

It was not immediately clear in Denmark. Clemens Petersen wrote a sour criticism of *The Pretenders* in *Fædrelandet* for April 2. Having expected something else of Ibsen, he insisted that the drama did not do justice to the talents of the author, and tried even to show that it was undramatic. Thus the play had no success in Denmark at the time, and it is doubtful if as many as twenty copies of the book came out among the people there. In Norway it was, despite all criticism, a triumph from the author's point of view. It was read and discussed, and it gripped the souls of those who had capacity for understanding its intellectual content.

Already by the middle of September, 1863, the play was accepted for presentation at the Christiania Theater, and on Sunday, January 17, 1864, it was played for the first time. It was not a uniformly excellent presentation.

Yet it won the public. Though it lasted for almost five full hours (after the first night the time of playing was reduced to four hours), we are told that "it was followed from beginning to end with rapt attention," and that "after the fall of the curtain there was a general demand for the author, who when he appeared was greeted by a storm of applause." In less than two months the play was presented eight times, a success unique for

a play so long and serious as this, in a town so small as the Christiania of that day

For Ibsen it was an even greater victory than *The Feast at Solhoug* had been, and as a victory it was worth far more, for it was not won by popular appeal. On the contrary, the author had set a high standard for himself and an almost equally high standard for his public. He had all the more reason to be proud of his triumph.

Since that time *The Pretenders* has appeared regularly on the Norwegian stage, and is there the classic national saga play above all others. But it has not had the same stage success in other lands. It was presented on the stage in Copenhagen in 1871, after *Brand* had made Ibsen known to the Danish people, and after *The League of Youth* had proved to them he could write good plays. It did well during the first season, but after that it was never played again. *The Pretenders* was the play which first introduced Ibsen to the stage outside of the Scandinavian lands. The boldly experimental Court Theater in Meiningen presented it in 1875 and the next year took it to Berlin. Other German theaters followed suit, and at least in Meiningen it was a success. The play, however, did not at any time take a strong hold on German thought and imagination, and it was not with this play that Ibsen was to win Germany. German critics agreed that it was "*ohne Bühnenwirkung*." It made a difference how the drama was played. If it fell through at the Schiller Theater in Berlin in 1901, Max Reinhardt made a great triumph with it at the Neues Theater in 1904, but it was never one of the plays that could find a permanent place at any

other theater either in Germany or in other foreign lands. The reason for this is undoubtedly that the play is too closely related to its Norwegian background. The great national challenge in it, the "king's-thought," is presented in a form that especially appeals to Norwegian national consciousness, and it is filled, one might perhaps say overburdened, with particular references to Norwegian history, which may be clear enough to Norwegians, but which make it seem somewhat remote to people of other nationalities.

It was thus only a Norwegian victory that Ibsen had won. Again he sailed to the fore among Norwegian writers, again he was in line with Björnson.

The greatest victory of all was that which he had won over himself. For the first time in his life he rested in a full and free confidence in his own ability to write and in his calling as poet. Earl Skule in *The Pretenders* had asked Jatgeir, the skald, "Have you at all times full faith that you are a skald?" The question arose from Ibsen's own doubt. Now he knew, like Jatgeir, that the calling was his, and he would not for anything relinquish it.

This firm faith gave him more assurance and courage than he had ever had before. When he had first waged war on the lies of society in *Love's Comedy*, society itself had rebuked him so harshly and severely that it had frightened him to the depths of his soul. Against such power he had become quite helpless, but now he felt that strength increased in him, and fear diminished.

He was already a man of thirty-six years. Through a long and hard battle he had tried to find himself, and during the struggle there had gathered within him a bitter hatred against the society

that had kept him down, that had cajoled and driven him into using his abilities for purposes which were never really his own, at least never fully his own. The whole of this society had become to him a single dangerous enemy which threatened to subdue a man's will and to make of him a slave, a power destructive to everything that was free and true, to natural impulses of growth and personal demands for justice.

Now he felt strong enough to wage war on the society in which falsehood and might ruled. He possessed an ethical anger and determination which could not but destroy conventions, he felt the call to awaken his people to freedom and an upright search for truth in thinking and acting.

A month after he had finished *The Pretenders*, he wrote a poem for a festival in the Students' Association on October 2, 1863, summarizing his thought in the following cry:

*Go first! now and forever,  
That is the call of truth  
Go first, in every battle  
That summons Norway's youth!*

It was himself he thus challenged. And his writings were soon to resound throughout the country, indeed throughout the world, as a trumpet call—awakening, challenging, rousing.

## Chapter Fifteen

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### THE GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT

**J**UST as Ibsen completed *The Pretenders* there was an order in council, September 12, 1863, to give him 400 specie dollars for foreign travel. This was much less than he had applied for, and less than he needed for a journey that was to last a whole year and carry him as far as he meant to go. Nevertheless he prepared to take a boat to Hamburg in November, but when it came to the point, he did not dare to set out with so little money, and the consequence was that he actually consumed almost half of his stipend at home. It was Bjornstjerne Björnson who helped scrape together a sufficient sum so that he could finally set out.

When Björnson moved to Oslo in the fall of 1863, the warm friendship between him and Ibsen which had been formed at the music festival in Bergen grew even warmer. Ibsen felt a debt of gratitude to Björnson, and in *The Pretenders* Björnson had full assurance that Ibsen was indeed a kindred spirit and a brother in arms. The two shared each other's thoughts as never before. Björnson, always eager to help, now set to work to raise money for Ibsen's journey. He had many powerful friends—Bernhard Dunker, the attorney, Johan Sverdrup, then a member of the Storting, and many others, and he possessed an unusual ability to enlist them in his generous projects. He succeeded in

collecting for his impecunious friend the sum of 700 specie dollars—much more than the entire State appropriation

When the ice broke in the spring of 1864, Ibsen set sail. On Saturday evening, April 2, he banqueted with his Hollander friends at a gathering which was both a celebration for Paul Botten Hansen, who had become University librarian, and a farewell party for Ibsen. Early Tuesday morning, April 5, he took the first steamboat going south, and the next day he arrived in Copenhagen.

To all appearances he was setting out on a peaceful study trip, and his friends at home presumably expected him to continue in the same style of writing that had brought him such large measure of success. His learned friend, M. Birkeland, recently appointed director of the Public Record office, had suggested to him a new national historical subject, the Norwegian Faroe viking, Magnus Heineson, who suffered death on the executioner's block in 1589, and who was looked upon as a sort of national martyr. Ibsen, following his friend's advice, had immediately set to work collecting all that he could find about this Magnus in the volume of Norwegian State papers which had just then been published. In the only letter from him which we have from these April days at Copenhagen, we learn that he intended to begin a new drama in five acts, undoubtedly the one about Magnus Heineson. This would indicate that he wished to continue writing in his earlier manner.

But in reality a wild tumult filled him, a storm which stirred his soul to the depths.

Nor is this strange, when one remembers what happened during his stay in Copenhagen. Many, many years later, recalling

to memory these days, he had but to say "It was in April, 1864" The very year and month spoke with an eloquence that needed no explanation from him, so tremendous were the external and internal events which he associated with these days And they so over shadowed all previous memories, that he felt as though he had never been in Copenhagen before

Denmark was at war In December, 1863, German armies had established themselves in Holstein, on February 1, 1864, Prussia and Austria had sent their troops across the Eider River into the Danish territory of Slesvig, and a few days later the Danes fled from the ancient and illustrious rampart Danevirke For ten weeks they defended themselves bravely behind the intrenchments at Dybbøl, but on April 18 the Prussians stormed Dybbøl and drove the Danes over to Als

This battle occurred while Ibsen was still in Copenhagen, and it seemed to lacerate his very being It seemed to him that might and force triumphed over right, that the ideas in which he believed were trodden roughly under foot Of course he was well enough aware that such things had happened before, but they had never before touched him so nearly In "Terje Vigen" he had sung about memories of a time when the English ruled the sea by force, but that was at least fifty years ago He remembered that during his own youth Russian power had put down the Hungarian revolt for freedom, but from the same period he remembered still more clearly that the Danish-German war had ended in victory for little Denmark, the war which had occurred later during his life, the Crimean, had at least a suggestion of idealism in it, and the same was true to an even greater



degree of the Italian war for liberation This time it seemed as if the cold, heartless doctrine that might is right had prevailed and cannon had become the ruler of the world

Ibsen rose in angry protest We find it vividly expressed in a poem which he wrote exactly a year later, in April, 1865, after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln European papers raised a hue and cry over the horror of the deed, but Ibsen could not understand why they were so shocked

*A Prussian misdeed, a Dybbol act,  
The world has witnessed ere now*

He reminded them of the treatment of Poland, and of the English attack on Copenhagen in 1807, and he blamed all Europe for permitting the continuation of such rule by force

*With vows forgotten and words untrue,  
With treaties ye tear and despoil,  
With perjured oaths that last year were new  
Ye have fertilized history's soil*

He would not believe that the last word had been spoken It seemed impossible to him that anything so hideous could endure Some storm must overthrow the whole rotten structure

*A will holds judgment and waits to tell  
That death to each lie is sure,  
But the worm must first have emptied the shell,  
And the times must first have turned themselves well  
Into their own caricature*

He believed in revolution, not in reform, and he hoped and believed that revolution would come the sooner, the more the rottenness was permitted to wax great

*—Let but the "system" work out its aim—*

*The sooner vengeance will bring it to shame*

*On the judgment day of our times*

If one would judge philosophically the political thought expressed here, one might call it romanticism, or one might compare it with the Hegelian philosophy of Marx which was taking form during these years. But it is clearly certain that for Ibsen this was not philosophy, it was his moral indignation which was aroused to such an extent that he could not be satisfied with anything short of the prospect of a judgment day.

The spectacle of the Dybbøl incident and the Danish defeat gave his anger a bitterness which the mere abstract idea of victory by force could not produce, and his anger was mingled with shame because his own people had deserted the Danish cause and had thereby made themselves partly responsible for the defeat. This feeling cut the more deeply into Ibsen since it concerned dreams and hopes that were rooted in the very life of his own heart.

He was a "Scandinavian," and the idea of Scandinavian unity was probably the only political theory to which he consistently adhered, from youth to old age. Much could be said about the purpose of this policy, both from a national and a social point of view. That which is perhaps most readily apparent is the feeling of weakness, the national timidity which underlay the whole movement, although this was not so evident until after the defeat of 1864. Before that time the most active element was the simple desire for closer union, a will to help one another which was free from selfish interest. At least this was true in Norway, where in contrast to the class controversies and eco-

nomic affairs that otherwise filled the politics of the fifties, Scandinavianism appeared as an idealistic relief—as a political movement which did not aim merely at power and gain. For this reason the idea naturally appealed to the academic youth of the country, and still more naturally it appealed to Henrik Ibsen.

It was during the war of 1848, and more particularly as a result of the battle of Slesvig on Easter Day, that interest in Scandinavianism was aroused in Norway, and Ibsen was awakened to the cause. One of his oldest poems, "The Giant Oak," urges Scandinavian unity, and in 1849 he wrote his challenge "Awaken Scandinavians!" calling Norwegians and Swedes to assist their Danish brothers in their war. The moral content of his politics is already evident here. It seemed to him a faithless act for his people to keep away from the struggle, and he was afraid that the faith thus broken could never be restored.

*No, brothers, no, there is a sacred law,  
Within the soul 'tis written: Serve thy brother!*

*'Tis written: Help what nature long has bound  
Unto thy heart with bonds of strength and beauty,  
Woe, woe, if you should fail when danger calls!*

With words almost similar to these he asked in 1864:

*What if our breaking faith with Denmark were the last  
Deed granted us to do while still a nation!*

A people without honor was in his opinion doomed to destruction.

Late, year by year, his song helped to blow life into Scandinavianism which in one of his poems, written for the

student meeting in 1851, he called "the best thought of the North " And always he identified it with the intellectual endeavor which was to ennoble the people

It might seem natural to suppose that the national movement, in which he was involved throughout the fifties, would weaken his Scandinavianism, but he found, rather, a connection between the two Immediately after he had written a poem in tribute to King Carl Johan as "the first Scandinavian of the century," early in 1858, he went into his first great battle for a national theater, insisting that national progress was one of the conditions for Scandinavian unity, that the Norwegian people must take their place as the equals of the Danes and Swedes, that they must be independent in intellectual life as well as in politics, before they could enter upon real co operation with the others and before they could contribute anything in such a co operation

He could become venomously angry when the Danes ridiculed the Norwegian nationalism, and he undoubtedly felt the sting in the vaudeville by Erik Bogh, which he played in his own theater in 1859, and which held up to ridicule the "Norwegian Norseman," Bjerkebæk This seems evident from the poem he wrote in the spring of 1861, when the same piece was played at the Christiania Theater, while a new war was brewing between Denmark and Germany He then had the Norwegian boys greet the Danes with the words

*Send word to the lordly Prussian,  
That if ye must fight to defend your land,  
All of us here will lend a hand—  
But first the Norwegian Norseman!*

Always foremost in his thought, always stronger and stronger as the danger of war threatened, was the feeling that Norway *must* help, to save her own honor His Seventeenth of May song for 1861 proclaimed

*Your Northern home cannot be free  
Until the South is guarded,  
Till Eastern threats of slavery  
Away from us are warded,  
All of the North must first be freed!  
Woe to him who shuns the deed  
And meets with words a brother's need,  
His name lies soon discarded*

The whole matter was for Ibsen summarized in the one command—to keep faith He had not forgotten the first student meeting of the Northern countries, in 1845, when, carried away by Orla Lehmann's enthusiasm, fifteen hundred Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish students pledged their honor and peace of mind that they would battle for Scandinavianism in life and in death Since that time one student meeting after another had rejoiced over and sung about Scandinavian unity, and the academic youth of the country had bound itself to the idea, most recently in a many voiced promise at the student conventions in Lund and Copenhagen in 1862 Ibsen was aware that such promises could not bind the nation or the kingdom, and he had often felt indignation because the farmers' majority in the Storting did not show sympathy with the Scandinavian movement Nevertheless there can hardly be any doubt that he, in common with other Scandinavians, believed their policy to have

much greater support, both within and without the Storting, than it finally proved to have. The "public opinion" expressed in the newspapers took its color chiefly from the official class, and was therefore uniformly Scandinavian.

More and more, the great question in Scandinavian relations was whether or not Norway and Sweden were to help Denmark in her Slesvig politics, and there were others besides the avowed Scandinavians who favored such action. That which chiefly gave the Danes a right to expect help was the fact that the young King of Sweden and Norway, Carl XV, and his Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Manderström, staunchly supported the Danish policy, and even encouraged action which must arouse German opposition. King Carl went so far as to offer Denmark an armed alliance, and Manderström sent out into the world a large number of ingenious notes which must be interpreted to mean that Norway and Sweden were closely allied to Denmark. It was a policy which played with fair words, hoping that words alone would clear up difficulties, but Ibsen, at least, believed that the words were seriously meant, and expected that deeds would follow them.

This political moral demand was indeed only one manifestation of the thought which underlay all of his earlier writings. All his national romanticism was grounded in the hope that memories of the past might become a power to rouse people to great deeds. It was a hope that he could never relinquish, a hope in which he steadfastly believed, but in which he never felt secure. In the *Andhrimner* days of his youth, doubt and irony had the upper hand, and in all the urging and admonition which later filled his writings, there was an underlying fear and anxiety, a

constant question as to whether he dared to rely on the purpose of his people. In *Love's Comedy* the anxiety turned into complaint against and opposition to the insincerity in society, and now, after Ibsen, in his poem for the festival in memory of the forefathers on January 13, 1863, had rejected pure national romanticism, it was the willingness to help Denmark in the struggle that became the touchstone of faithfulness in the Norwegian people.

The great political crisis, with disagreements and dangers following each other in rapid succession, occurred a few months later. The March ordinance which separated Slesvig from Holstein, the November constitution which united Slesvig more closely with Denmark, the change on the Danish throne reopening the whole question of the succession, the military intervention of the German Confederation in Holstein in December, the Prussian-Austrian ultimatum to Denmark in the middle of January, 1864, and two weeks later—war. Denmark had adopted a national policy which did indeed have an historical justification under previous conditions, but which came into conflict with later agreements and actual changes. Disagreement and open conflict were the inevitable results.

Count Manderström had announced to all the world that Norway and Sweden supported the new Danish policy, a special resolution of the Norwegian Storting in May, 1863, gave acknowledgement to the political line which the Department of Foreign Affairs had followed up to this time, and announced that Norway and Sweden could not tolerate any violation of Danish independence, in July, Manderström sent warning to the Western powers that the two kingdoms could hardly remain

neutral in a Danish German war, and a few days later King Carl XV directly offered Denmark armed alliance

But at this point, strong forces of opposition to a policy leading to war arose in both Norway and Sweden. The majority in the Swedish Government turned a solid front against the King and Manderstrom, who in September were compelled to retract. They were not to be permitted to plunge their countries into war against the great German powers unless they could secure a guarantee of support from the powers of western Europe. In October the Danish government was informed that there was no hope of an armed alliance, but negotiations were not completely broken off, for the Danish government believed that the mere threat of Norwegian and Swedish armed intervention might prevent Germany from going to war. Only two weeks before receiving the announcement from Stockholm, the Danish Government had made the proposals that were to be embodied in the November Constitution, and at the same time the German Confederation had given warning that it would intervene in Holstein. The danger was so great that the Danes caught at even the slightest straw of hope.

In Sweden a stronger and stronger sentiment demanded that the country be kept out of war and alliances, and King Carl was forced to assure the Swedish Riksdag, early in December, that no one could rightfully claim armed assistance from him. The truth was that he still hoped for authority to engage his countries in the war for Denmark, and on December 15 a large Danish newspaper, *Fædrelandet*, announced that he had promised to bring an army. The Danish people were still not informed that he and Manderström had been forced to withdraw from the



negotiations for alliance, and another large Danish newspaper, *Dagbladet*, also for December 15, explained that Swedish Norwegian support was after all a reality, adding that it would now appear whether Manderström "is only a facile pen or a real statesman"—a remark which through Ibsen's writings became permanently attached to the name of the great Swedish note writer

Two days earlier Ibsen had sent out the powerful and bitter challenging poem, "A Brother in Need"

*Now, rally once, if ne'er again,  
With flag at half-mast flown,  
A people in dire need and strain  
Mans Tyra's bastion<sup>1</sup>  
Betrayed in danger's hour, betrayed  
Before the stress of strife!  
Was this the meaning that it had—  
The clasp of hands at Axelstad<sup>2</sup>  
Which gave the North new life?*

*The words that seemed as if they rushed  
From deepest heart-springs out  
Were phrases, then!—the freshet gushed,  
And now is fall'n the drought  
The tree, that promised rich in bloom  
Mid festal sun and shower,  
Stands wind-stript in the lowering gloom,  
A cross to mark young Norway's tomb,  
The first dark testing hour*

<sup>1</sup> The old border rampart, Danevirke

<sup>2</sup> Copenhagen

may guess the feverish anxiety with which he waited for the decision

The answer seemed to come immediately On Saturday evening, December 12, a large meeting of the Students' Association adopted a communication to be sent to the Swedish students, urging them to regard the Danish cause as their own, to regard it as their duty to fight by the side of Denmark, and as a shame to let her stand alone It was at this meeting that Professor Aschehoug spoke of how difficult it is for a small people to think great thoughts, yet it seemed that many Norwegians thought greatly now Hardly more than a week later a mass meeting of three thousand men in Oslo sent assurance to the King that they would support him in a war for Denmark

King Carl seemed also to have a hope that he might secure the support of Norway, even if Sweden proved stubborn, and in January, 1864, he summoned the Norwegian Storting to meet for consultation in March In the meantime the war came, and the Danes gave way before the greater power In Denmark, too, the Norwegian Storting became the last hope

The meeting proved to be but a confirmation of disappointment While a minority in the Storting wished to give the King free hands, the Government itself tried to persuade the Storting to bind him, and the majority followed the Government On March 29 they set aside an appropriation of money for purposes of war, but only on the condition that one of the Western powers would help them A minority would even demand that *both* of the Western powers should promise co operation, and in addition to this the Storting, though with a bare majority, declared out

right that the Norwegian people did not wish for any closer political connection with Denmark. This was a death blow to all Scandinavianism.

A restitution might still have been possible if the youth of the country had, in large numbers, volunteered for the war, and not a few did so both in Norway and Sweden. But there were not enough to vindicate the nations. On April 2, 1864, one of the volunteers, the young divinity candidate, Christopher Bruun, speaking to the Students' Association, reproached his comrades because they lacked courage and manliness to keep what they had promised at the student meeting, but his words were given a rather cold reception.

Ibsen, being at a farewell party with his friends, did not hear the speech, but during his last days in Norway the facts were dinned continually in his ears. The Storting had precluded the possibility of helping Denmark, and the academic youth were cold, or at most but lukewarm, in their attitude to the Danish brothers. Now that serious danger threatened, the high words lost their power and faded strangely away in the distance.

It laid a cold hand upon Ibsen's heart, and made him feel numb and helpless, and in need of a "Journey of Forgetfulness" in which he might hide from himself. In this mood he left the country.

*I blew through the land a bugle call  
In my verse, but nobody stirred at all*

*My bolt was shot, I embarked, and forth  
I steamed from the dearly beloved North*

Perhaps some incident of this voyage gave occasion for the satiric poem which he first called "From the Dybbøl Days," and to which he later gave the ironic title "Well Grounded Faith" At least we have here a suggestion of what filled his mind during these days, bitter disgust with a people which felt secure in its own impotence

What did it matter, then, that almost the first thing he read upon coming to Copenhagen was the judgment of Clemens Petersen upon *The Pretenders in Fædrelandet* for April 2 Sensitive as Ibsen generally was, there is not the slightest indication that he cared in the least about this criticism He was thinking of quite other things

He remained in Copenhagen for two weeks, trying to center his thoughts on his new dramatic subject, Magnus Heineson, which he hoped to have worked out before the end of the summer But he could not write His thoughts turned constantly toward Dybbøl, where the Prussian cannon thundered against the Danish intrenchments

On April 20, two days after the fall of Dybbøl, he took a boat to Lübeck He stopped on his way south at Berlin, whence he has recorded but one memory—the mental agony he experienced on May 4, when the Danish cannon from Dybbøl were driven into the city amid shouts of victory "If I had remained longer in Berlin," he wrote in a letter from Rome nine months later, "where I saw the procession in April, and saw the bellowing populace wallow amongst the trophies of Dybbøl, saw them riding the gun carriages and spitting into the cannon—the same cannon to which we had given no help, but which had still

gone on shooting until they burst—then I do not know how much longer I could have kept my mind ” Almost a year later, it was still the same incident that recurred when he wrote about the days in Berlin “I saw the populace spit into the mouths of the Dybbøl cannon, and it was to me a sign of how history will sometime spit into the eyes of Sweden and Norway for the sake of that affair ” He could indeed say truthfully that it was “really not a pleasure trip” on which he was bound, for he could not escape from “the sad thoughts of matters at home ” They tormented him all the way

## Chapter Sixteen

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### FERMENT

HE hurried southward to Vienna, whence he took the Semmering Railway, the only one which at that time crossed the Alps. Ibsen never forgot the powerful impression made by his first view of the South, of Italy—though as a matter of fact the country that he first reached beyond the Alps was at that time subject to Austria. He recalled the occasion in a speech in Copenhagen when he was seventy years old. It is possible that he mistook the dates, as he placed the crossing of the Alps on May 9, but the image remained clearly in his mind. "Upon the vast mountains hung clouds like great, dark curtains, and underneath them we drove through tunnels, finding ourselves suddenly at Miramare, where the beauty of the South, a wonderful soft brightness, shining like white marble, was suddenly revealed to me, and was destined to set its stamp on all my later production, even if that production was not all beauty."

He felt that he had escaped from darkness into light and sunshine, and he believed later that all his writing was given a new tone by his life there, though it took some time before the influence of his new surroundings was clearly visible. The first effect was his ability to throw aside, for a while, all thoughts of the wretchedness at home. He felt light and happy, and wished only to live for poetry and artistic enjoyment.

One Sunday morning, June 19, 1864, Ibsen rang the door bell

at the Scandinavian Club in Rome, and met a young Norwegian friend who was engaged in the study of art, Lorentz Dietrichson. All day long they sauntered about the city together, and when evening came and they sat down to a bottle of wine in a little inn by the river, Dietrichson felt that he had been with an entirely new man. Ibsen was no longer reserved and bitter, as Dietrichson had seen him in Christiania in the winter of 1861-62. It is true, he spoke with indignant heat about the politics of the Danish question, but he could laugh at the controversy over *Love's Comedy*, he rejoiced in the victory he had won with *The Pretenders*, and he pictured to himself the rich and fair times that he was now to enjoy.

Two weeks later he moved up to the little mountain town of Genzano, where he lived during two hot summer months, sharing a room with the Finnish sculptor, Walter Runeberg. Dietrichson had moved up there earlier, and the mother of Christopher Bruun was living there with a son and a daughter. It was a happy and peaceful time for Ibsen. The people there called him Capelone, from the broad brimmed hat that he wore, and he moved freely among them, good humored and kind. The afternoons he often spent with his friends in the woods, and in the evenings there were tours around the dark Lake Nemi.

In September he moved back to Rome, and two months later he sent for his wife and child. After that he felt that he had a home in the city.

Delay followed upon delay before he began to work. He sauntered about enjoying art and antiquities. For full half days he lingered about the Roman tombs on the Via Appia or the Via Latina or among the mighty ruins of the baths of Caracalla. It seemed to

him, he wrote in a letter, to be "an idleness which cannot be called a waste of time." He found enjoyment, and he learned things. Something new was forming within his brain, while the life, nature, and art about him—perhaps chiefly the art—left marks upon his spiritual life.

It is impossible for a Norwegian to go Italy without being overwhelmed by the wealth of art that meets him there. The poverty and destitution of our own land are never borne in on him with such terrible vividness as when he goes about there seeing only works of art, temples and churches, towers and castles and other buildings, statues and paintings by the thousands—works of art from every age and of all types, ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and modern.

To Ibsen the arrival in Rome must have been the opening of a new world. Yet he was far from being equally or in the same way impressed by all that he saw. He knew that according to the taste of the times he ought to be especially enthusiastic about ancient art and whatever was modeled after it, but he could not feel so. The art of antiquity seemed cold to him. He could not find in it the personal life which he demanded of art, everything seemed done according to rules and conventions, it seemed to bear the marks of the age rather than of the individual. He went through the Vatican with Lorentz Dietrichson and quarreled with him about the Greek and Roman portrait busts, maintaining that the Roman were far superior because they were much more highly individualized and could by a mere shade of expression about the mouth or a wrinkle in the forehead give a revelation of character.

Through single powerful works of art he caught glimpses of the old Greek world of beauty. He stood, for instance, before



the tragic muse in the Vatican "The indescribably high, great, and quiet joy in the expression of the face, the richly leaf crowned head, in an unearthly way luxurious and bacchanalian, the eyes looking inward upon self and at the same time through and far beyond what they are gazing at—that is what the Greek tragedy was like" It was no mere coincidence that of all Greek art Melpomene, the tragic muse, gripped him first and most intensely His strongest sense was for the dramatic, for the things that were most vividly alive

Of the newer art he loved especially Michelangelo and the baroque which followed him, Bernini and his school This fact is particularly remarkable, for through all of the nineteenth century the baroque was generally considered a decadent form of art, a falling away from true beauty Bernini was disparagingly called a theater artist, and only a few years ago an excellent Italian history of art used as its heading for the work of Michelangelo *Crepuscolo barocco*, that is, the twilight which led into the night of the baroque This art Ibsen understood and delighted in "Raphael's art has never really warmed me," he wrote five years later But Michelangelo! "In my opinion no one has transgressed the conventions of beauty more than he, but whatever he has created is beautiful nevertheless, for it is full of character"

The spirit which distinguishes the baroque is the desire for life, movement, conflict—expressed in art by a striving for sharp contrasts, light against darkness, color striking against color It wants to agitate and to take hold The spirit of the baroque is dramatic, and it was in the period of the baroque that modern drama arose The bold personal element in this art appealed to

Ibsen, who dared to praise not only Michelangelo, but even Bernini "These men were brave enough to commit an occasional folly"

For the same reason Ibsen preferred the daring Gothic of the Middle Ages to the classic style of the Renaissance. Having seen the cathedral at Milan, he could not imagine anything more imposing. "The man who could conceive the plan for such a work of art may well, during his leisure hours, have hit upon the idea of making a moon and throwing it out into space."

Such art as this set his imagination in motion, and caused visions to arise in him. The time was to come when this same art should help him find a natural and personal form for the creative ideas that were working within him.

Various plans for writing attracted him. A drama about Emperor Julian was planned one day in a conversation with Dietrichson at Genzano. At the same time he felt in a way an obligation to write one about Magnus Himeson. Yet it was neither of these, but a drama of quite another nature that forced itself more and more upon him, a work arising from the memories of home which after all he had not been able to leave behind him.

Two weeks after he had moved back to Rome from Genzano, on September 16, 1864, he wrote to Björnson "Rome is a blessedly peaceful place to write. At present I am working on a long poem and have in preparation a tragedy, *Julian the Apostle*, a work which fills me with tremendous joy, and which I think will be successful. By spring, or at least during the summer, I hope to have both works completed."

By the next spring we hear that the drama about Julian is still "in preparation." The poem on which he was working was

the great epic dealing with a clergyman named Koll, who was later renamed Brand—a poem of judgment upon the Norwegian people

Try as he might to push them aside, thoughts of the latest events at home kept recurring to him. A few days after his first arrival in Rome, he ate supper with a group of other Northerners at a restaurant in the outskirts of the city. Concerning this evening Dietrichson relates "It being the first evening in a long time that Ibsen was with other Scandinavians, he began to describe his painful, agitating impressions of the recent events of the war, as he had seen them on his journey. But little by little, and quite imperceptibly, his story took on the character of an improvised oration in which all of the suppressed bitterness, all the glowing anger, all the warm love for the cause of the North, which had so long been locked up within him, were released. A ring came into his voice, in the evening twilight one saw only his glowing eyes, and when he stopped no one cried bravo, no one touched a glass, but I think we all felt that on that evening the Marseillaise of the North, heard by only a few, rang into the Roman night to leave no trace, and I know that I have never at any other time, not even approximately, been so carried away by the power of the living word as I was that night."

The speech came as a volcanic outbreak that could not be stopped, and *Brand* came in the same way. It was an indignant oration to his countrymen.

During the winter in Rome that followed, Ibsen had occasion to give many speeches of the same sort. The Northerners of the city often gathered for the evening in an old wine shop in the Via del Tritone, directly opposite the house in which Ibsen had

taken lodging with his wife and little Sigurd, close to the Quirinal Here, too, he was known as Capellone But he was leader of the group, and the companionship loosed his tongue About thirty years later the Swedish poet Carl Snoilsky recalled the memories of these evenings in a poem to Ibsen

*Year sixty four, When the Dybbol thunders  
Still found an echo, 'Mid Southland wonders*

*In the silver shimmer Of Roma's moon  
Each night we met At our loved Tritone*

*'Mongst vineyard peasants, By firelight meeting,  
A group from the Northland Gave friendly greeting*

*On the hearth our dinner Was in the making  
In wine filled glasses Bright lights were breaking*

*You sat at the middle Of our long table  
A leader of youth And in speaking able*

*When a faithless deed Stained the Northern name,  
We shared the sorrow, We shared the shame*

*I hear you speak As the night comes winging,  
Beneath the great hat Your voice is ringing!*

In a rather unexpected way Snoilsky had occasion to discover how hot Ibsen's anger was Chancing one day in the reading room of the Scandinavian Club to find a picture of Count Manderstöm in the Danish *Illustreret Tidende*, he noticed a

pencil drawn rope about the man's neck Snoilsky, being no less than a nephew of the Countess Manderstrom, was deeply offended. Going directly to the librarian, Dietrichson, he demanded to know who was guilty of wanting to hang the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the next meeting of the Club, therefore, Dietrichson requested the bold artist to confess, and the one to arise was Henrik Ibsen. Later he and Snoilsky had a private settlement and parted as friends, though still disagreeing about the Manderström politics, for which Ibsen felt no mercy.

Through his letters home we can see how his indignation constantly flared up within him, and how it was gnawing at his heart, this question of whether there was any hope of restitution for a people which had deserted its honor and duty. His view of Norwegian-Swedish politics in the Danish controversy was wholly unpractical. He did not consider the question of whether any blame attached to the Danish side, and he cared still less that Norway and Sweden were small and weak states. He gave room only to the ethical aspect of the matter, the obligation to give battle, even to the last drop of blood, for what was right. It had seemed a matter of vital concern that Norwegians and Swedes should help defend the Scandinavian race against force and oppression. Indeed the duty of turning against the oppressor was incumbent upon all people, but that his own countrymen should shirk the task seemed to him an act of faithlessness which must weaken them for all time.

"Political conditions at home," he wrote to Bjornson in September, 1864, "have given me much pain, and have embittered much of my enjoyment. So it was nothing, then, but lies and dreams. On me, at any rate, the most recent events will

have a strong influence Our older history may now be struck out, for the modern Norwegian has clearly no more connection with his past than the Greek pirates have with the race that sailed to Troy and was succored by the gods "

There is an echo here of the thought that Byron placed in the mouth of the Greek minstrel in *Don Juan*, in verses which Vinje had recently translated into Norwegian the poet must blush when he sings of his forefathers' deeds This, then, was the judgment upon national romanticism

To Ibsen it was a judgment upon his own past Selecting from his old cycle of poems, "In the Picture Gallery," the verses in which he had described his poetry as the bookish rustle of dried leaves, he discovered in them now a new meaning and rewrote them in a poem which he later called "The Cleft " Much of his earlier work appeared to him as a freshet at flood time As soon as the storm was over, the river was dry Leaves and rubbish—nothing else—filled its bed Such rubbish he had kept alive by his effort, and about it he had written poetry

*Faint memories of water bright—*

*Myself have romanced there one night*

He remembered with anguish a time when he had served the will of others, and he seemed to himself like the bear which the ringmaster compelled to dance, and which he described in "The Power of Memory"

*I, too, had once a taste of the copper,  
With orchestra and a fire, all proper,*

*And burned a trifle more than my fingers,  
Still lively the recollection lingers*

*So let of that day but an echo sound,  
On a glowing grid I seem to be bound,*

*As the quick of the nail to a stab must answer,  
I find my verse feet and straight turn dancer*

He was unwilling any longer to take a part in that dance, to fool himself and his people with "this insincere playing with things that are dead" He was participant in the sins of his people, and retribution must fall with ten fold weight upon him who was a poet

*For we have played to a decaying race,  
And painted up the corpse of ancient glory,  
And decked with giant swords the halls of story,  
To give the modern dwarf a smiling face  
We sang about the day, though it was night,  
Forgetting one important thing to measure  
How may the heritage be held aright,  
By hands that are too weak to grasp the treasure?*

Ibsen wished to confess the sin, express the remorse of his people

*And therefore I have turned my thoughts away  
From all the soulless sagas of past making,  
And from false dreams of future times awaking,  
I face the musty dimness of today*

He wanted to get away from the æsthetic viewpoint of his past, away from the pleasures of art, into life itself Better to have a sound conscience than a clever mind

After spending more than a year in Italy, he considered it the greatest gain of this period of travel that he had driven out of

himself "the æsthete" He had never, to be sure, been "spineless" enough to harbor a wholly æsthetic view of life, but, he wrote to Björnson, "I do not know what might have been made of me by all sorts of intellectual asses, if they had been permitted to keep me undisturbed "

Now he felt emancipated "The thing," he wrote to Magdalene Thoresen, "which has been of the most decisive importance to me, is that I am at a sufficient distance from home to see the hollowness back of the self made lies in our so-called public life, and the pitifulness of all the personal phrase making, eloquent enough in talking about 'a great cause,' but never possessing the will, the ability, or the feeling of duty necessary for a great deed How often do we not hear our good people of Norway speak with innate self satisfaction about the Norwegian sobriety, which signifies really nothing but that lukewarm middle temperature of the blood which makes it impossible for the respectable souls to be guilty of folly on a grand scale — With us impossibility sets in as soon as the demand goes beyond everyday claims "

Ibsen himself could not by any means remain lukewarm He was all aflame, new fuel was constantly being added to the fire "Here in Rome," he writes in a letter, "I found all sorts of moral filth among the Scandinavians What do you think of the fact that Danish men and women sit on Sundays in the chapel of the Prussian embassy, amongst the Germans, at the very time of the war, and listen devoutly while the Prussian priest in the pulpit prays for the success of Prussian arms in the righteous war against the enemy! You may be sure that I have raged and cleaned things up, for here I am not afraid of anything, but at



home I was afraid when, standing in the midst of the clammy crowd, I felt their evil smiles behind me ”

In Norwegian papers that came to Rome, Ibsen read the account of a peasant boy who cut off his finger to escape going to war. In contrast to this he heard how Italian mothers had taken fourteen year old boys out of school and sent them with Garibaldi to fight for national unity. The willingness to sacrifice one's self for a great ideal seemed to live in other people—only not in the Norwegians.

During the evenings at Tritone it was about this subject that his talk forever turned. He sat at the head of the table guiding the conversation, and whether it took a bantering or a serious turn, it always passed a death sentence upon every manifestation of negation or compromise.

The starting point of discussion on these occasions was a stock question: should one swallow latch keys rather than become an office clerk? It was reported of a young English poet that he died of starvation because he would not give up his poetry, and that after his death the latch key was found sticking in his throat. The question was: should he have found some other means of livelihood, for instance a position as office clerk? Ibsen would make it an uncompromising demand that the poet should swallow the latch key, and the discussion would immediately be in full progress. Some of those present were always ready to defend the opposite point of view, and Ibsen found great enjoyment in drawing them out by bolder and bolder paradoxes until they were driven to the exposition of standard bourgeois ideas of morality, which in turn provided him with material for his drama, *Brand*. When they had proved, as surely as two and two

are four, that one often must and should conform to circumstances, Ibsen retorted by asking if it was absolutely certain that two and two are four, for instance, on the planet Jupiter. The argument would then slip into new paradoxes, reminiscent of the discussions in the "Hollander" group of friends in Christiania. But underneath the fun there was always a deep seriousness, and time and again Ibsen's speech would rise to a power and solemnity by which all were deeply stirred.

Since his own people had let the spirit of negation rule, even in the hour of worst need, he expected an ill fate for them. "There is an anxiety upon me," he wrote to Bjornson, "which tells me that our people are confronted, not with eternity, but only with a brief span of existence. When I read the reports from home and regard all our respectable and estimable small heartedness and earthly mindedness, I do it with the same feeling as that with which a distracted person stares into a single, concentrated dark point." To Fru Thoresen he wrote "It often strikes me as a dreary task to work in a time like the present. If the nation's cultural life has not an endless future before it, it is really a matter of no importance whether the respite is one year or one hundred years. And for Norway and Sweden this seems to be the situation. We have not the will to make sacrifices when the proper moment comes, we have no ground on which to meet, no great sorrow, such as Denmark has, for our people lacks that elevation of soul which is necessary to the feeling of sorrow."

He thought the outlook seemed hopeless. Yet he could not relinquish hope. As at all other times in his life, faith and discouragement stood side by side, and he was too strong to sur-

render Writing to Bjornson for comfort and help, he added on his own account "Often it appears to me unthinkable that we should perish A state may be annihilated, but not a nation Therefore the best in us I believe will live, provided that the spirit of our people has sufficient exaltation to thrive in and upon disaster, but that is the great and crucial question If one only had faith and confidence!"

He took it as his mission to stir the sluggish conscience of his countrymen, to compel people to see themselves in a true light, and thereby to help them regain an ethical basis for their life Deep in his heart he believed that he possessed strength for such work, and his writing was to be the medium by which he accomplished it "*One to many can give light      Much availeth one will's might.*"

During this winter in Rome he spoke often with Christopher Bruun, who had come down there when back from the Danish war He was a man after Ibsen's own heart, one who without ostentation did what he considered his duty, irrespective of what it cost He had fought at Dybbol, risking his life for Denmark He had something of an Old Testament prophet in him "He loved over exertion in people," Björnson once said of him There was something superhuman in his demand for harmony between ideals and practice. It was exactly such a man that Ibsen now had need of, and he liked to talk with Bruun They discussed religious questions Bruun had taken his degree in theology, though he did not seek a call as pastor, feeling uncertain in matters of doctrine, and considering the State Church an abomination because it made the ministry a government office and cared nothing whether spirit and life conformed to teaching

Sören Kierkegaard had lodged the same complaint against the Church, and Ibsen's thought held the same direction

On one occasion when he was speaking with Bruun about Norway and the Danish problem, Bruun in his direct way asked why Ibsen had not himself gone to the war, since he had so strongly urged others to do so "We poets have other tasks," answered Ibsen curtly The answer was the same as that with which Bjørnson had met a similar question each man must use his talents where they will do most good This might be true and right, but Ibsen felt the sting in the question, which brought more pointedly home to him the feeling that he was "partner in guilt" with his people As he sat down to write, his mood would be playful like the children in his poem "A Home Study"

—Oh, grand

*Was the race we started through fairyland,*

but then there would fall upon his spirit a weight so grievous that, seeing himself as in the mirror, he could write no more

*And there stood a stranger, grave, sedate,*

*Close buttoned, with eyes of the grey of slate,*

*And slippers, or I'm in error*

Thus, under the guise of a home scene, he described himself during the struggle that was just now going on within him He saw himself as the man without valor, who looked into his own eyes and lost, through his self-searching, the power to write

Such discouragement came upon him only in his dark moments Otherwise the thought of his past sins of commission and omission had the opposite effect of inciting and driving him to work The sense of guilt within him roused in him a new de-

termination to chastise and a new courage to fight, and more than ever he felt compelled to turn his calling as poet into a power for the restitution of his people

To the new publisher whom Björnson had secured for him in Copenhagen, the manager of Gyldendalske Boghandel, Fr Hegel, he wrote of his new drama "Norwegians and Swedes have a terrible blood guilt to wash away before your people, and I look upon it as my appointed task to use the talents God has given me in rousing my countrymen from their lethargy, and making them see the import of the great life problems" At the same time he wrote to King Carl about "the life work which I certainly believe and know that God has given me, the work that seems to me the most necessary and the most important in Norway—to awaken the people and make them think great thoughts"

This was his intention in writing the drama on which he now worked, the drama which later became *Brand*

## Chapter Seventeen

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### BRAND

IT "began growing like an embryo within me," he says of *Brand*, referring to the days in Berlin when he saw the triumphant procession from Dybbøl. Very probably he began to plan the epic during the summer at Genzano, and he worked at it in Rome until the next summer.

Yet he had not progressed far, for he found the task slow and laborious. It is remarkable that when writing to Björnson about his work in September, 1864, he speaks of the "tremendous joy" with which he looks forward to the drama about Julian, but that he has nothing to say about the great work which after all proceeded from the feelings that burned most intensely in him.

He felt the need of a new form for his new type of subject matter. He wanted to present to his people the picture of a man who in all his life made not the slightest compromise in will or demand, and apparently he meant to give the history of this man from the cradle to the grave.

I think there can be no doubt that, when he conceived this plan, he had in mind to create a Norwegian counterpart to the narrative poem *Adam Homo* by the Dane Fr. Paludan Müller, and that therefore he wished to write in narrative form. It is distinctly noticeable, too, that the verse form which he chose, five foot iambic meter and eight line stanzas, is exactly that of *Adam Homo*, except that the rhyme scheme differs somewhat.

In the prologue of his poem, Paludan Müller presented a program which Ibsen could just now adopt as his own

*The olden times have long ere now departed,  
When to the minstrel harps the great shields rang,  
When to the hero bold the minstrel sang,  
Or soothed and cheered the wounded and faint hearted  
The spirits that to olden battles darted,  
Lie bound and do not waken to the clang  
The bard who now tries hero tales unfolding,  
Pours new wine into bottles that are moulding*

*Therefore the muse is finding other pathways  
Within the boundless land of poesy,  
Therefore in forms that suit the present day,  
She would again her world to us display*

A striking contrast appears, however, in the men whom the two poets chose as subjects for their song, a contrast which one might be tempted to say had its origin in the difference between two racial temperaments. Where the Danish poet could find an outlet for his emotions in cold, restrained irony, the Norwegian poet had to "storm ahead with the sharp sword of vengeance" and let his anger blaze out upon a decadent race, and while Ibsen chose as his hero a sternly serious man who recklessly, almost wildly, followed the call of the ideal, a man quite apart from the workaday world, Paludan Müller chose precisely "a stuff of everyday cut"

*The hero, with a Danish nature real,  
Shall freely live the life of everyday,*

*And keeping far away from the ideal,*

*In unromantic prose he takes his way*

The poet, in portraying such a "hero," hoped that

*A thought at last will in his life be mirrored*

*And from the poem clearly will proceed*

Ibsen had the same thought

*Now to my song my harp is tuned low,*

*But hidden strings do make a richer playing*

*A poem lies within the poem so—*

*Who hears its voice, knows what my song is saying*

Further, Ibsen's insistence that the poet should lead the people and "solve their secret longings with his song," agrees well with the closing words of Paludan Müller's prologue

*And thus, we know, the minstrel finds it ever,*

*When poetry awakens in his breast,*

*With voices of the future he is prest,*

*To utter things that other men heard never*

*Love, joy, and sorrow, anger and endeavor,*

*Voices of bitterness and voices blest,*

*All soonest stir within his spirit tender*

*And songs that sound afar do there engender*

These last two lines had more than once been used by Ibsen in his national admonitory poems, and it seems clear that the tones of the prologue to *Adam Homo* had long stirred within his spirit before he created his *Brand*. Though he was too warmly indignant to give the picture of his contemporaries in cool and quiet art, the great fundamental thought in his work was the same as that on which *Adam Homo* was built



*All life is will, which is in every spirit  
If high or low, the thing of greatest merit*

Now that Ibsen wished to show his people a man who without chaffer adhered to this principle, his thoughts went naturally back to the circumstances which were capable of fostering both the people and the man. He remembered with especial distinctness the fjord and mountain districts which he had visited two years ago, he saw again before him the steep and narrow gorge by which he had descended as he traveled from Gudbrandsdalen to Fortun in Sogn, he remembered the narrow strips of seacoast with their steep hillsides, to which the houses seemed to cling below the rock-strewn slopes as if seeking protection from avalanches and falling boulders, he remembered having heard at Sunnmøre of homes built so that the avalanches from the great snowfields above could shoot past, directly over the house. It had been borne in on him with overwhelming power that people living in such constant danger and dread must be bowed down to earth, must become slaves and "sons of misery." And many traits of which he heard on his journey confirmed his belief that the people in these communities for the most part served mammon and were but poorly able to raise their thoughts to God, that they indeed turned Christianity itself into a means of worldly gain.

Yet he had felt the presence of powers which could throw off the weight and bear the soul aloft to a higher and freer outlook. On the mountain heights he had heard the voice of God, and as he gazed upward along high, strong peaks rising toward the heavens, he knew that however narrow might be the space below, there was a way to the heights. The strong man of his

vision, instinctively identified with such a peak, was therefore first given the name of Koll<sup>1</sup> Later the fire within his spirit burned so fiercely that he must perforce bear the name of Brand<sup>2</sup> It is well to remember that he, too, had his home in the narrow gorges, that there he was steeled for strife, that he was born of the "mountain nature"

But Ibsen could not make of his poem what he had intended Though he succeeded in giving a glimpse of the fear which oppressed Brand's childhood, and managed to bring his hero over the mountain and down into the neighborhood where he was to take up his battle, there was no true unity in the story It was broken by too many episodes, the story of the boy who cut off his finger, the description of the Seventeenth of May celebration in Oslo, and other such things, and Ibsen was never genuinely satisfied with the work

Besides, there were other things that troubled him He was worried about money affairs The sum which had been pledged to him from home did not always arrive on time, and being sometimes destitute week after week, he was forced to borrow what he needed This reminded him too much of life at home, and of the fact that he had not yet won complete freedom Two months after he left Oslo, his creditors there had put to auction whatever he owned of household goods and books It seems to have taken a long time before he heard of what had happened, but then it came as a hard blow, as "an unutterably bitter message to receive" Especially did it torment him to think that even his letters and papers had been spread abroad amongst

<sup>1</sup> Norwegian for "mountain peak"

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian for "fire"

strangers He was entirely helpless, and could only "howl"

In the summer of 1865 he moved up to the small mountain village of Ariccia, a short distance from Genzano Thither money was sent him, Björnson having persuaded Hegel to give him advance royalties And on a warm day in July he suddenly saw clearly, as by a revelation, how the drama of Brand should be written

He relates his experience in a letter to Björnson on September 12 "Everything is now as it should be, and indeed it has been so all along, except during the few times when I have not known where to turn, in any respect—not only with regard to money, but because I could make no progress with my work Then one day, being in Rome on an errand, I went to St Peter's Church, where I suddenly perceived a strong and clear form for what I had to say Now I have thrown overboard the attempts with which I tormented myself for a whole year without getting any where, and in the middle of July I started something new which has progressed as no other work of mine has ever done It is new in the sense that I recently began the writing, but the subject matter and mood have been upon me like a nightmare ever since the many dismal events at home led me to examine myself and our life there and to reflect upon things which formerly passed lightly by, and to which I had given no serious thought It is a drama in poetic form, subject matter from present-day life, serious in content, five acts of rhymed verse (no *Love's Comedy*) The fourth act is now completed, and I feel that I can write the fifth in a week's time I am working both forenoon and afternoon, a thing which I have never before been able to do The place here is blessedly peaceful, no acquaintances,

and I read nothing but the Bible That is powerful and strong ”

It is certainly not without significance that Ibsen makes special mention of St Peter's Church in connection with his sudden perception of a new form for *Brand*. He must have recognized some connection between his new poetic vision and the powerful structure in which he met the spirit that had attracted him to both the baroque and the medieval Gothic. Here the pure Renaissance style of Bramante was set off by the boldness of Michelangelo and Bernini in a combination of ungovernable will and harmonic serenity the effect of which was perhaps principally dramatic. Here was restraint and freedom at the same time—a power which bore the spirit heavenward and established firmly the lines for its flight.

Here *Brand* became a drama.

Here, at the same time, Ibsen's fate as a poet was determined forever. Never again did he try to employ any other form than the dramatic. He had intended to write a narrative about Brand, but in a flash he saw his hero in the midst of battle against hostile powers and against himself, and the complete drama, with rising and falling action, was instantly clear. Equally clear, at last, was the realization of his own creative powers. There was a battle-field within him, and every thought and feeling that lived in the age and to which he gave form and expression was like the birds in the song of the Memnon statue.

*Zeus the Omniscient*

*Shaped them contending*

The opposing ideas contended for mastery within himself, and therefore the form of his writing must be the drama, which though filled with conflict is not shattered by it, which releases

the struggle and yet restrains it. This was the spirit which Henrik Ibsen recognized in the Italian world of art and expressed in the words "Everything is immense here, but an unutterable peace rests over it all." It was a spirit of tremendous strength held in check by a law bound will. Such was the nature of his own spirit, and such became the nature of his writing.

The same vehement power that moved him during the writing of *The Pretenders* came upon him again, only more strongly. Never before had he felt such forces within him, never had he known his genius to well up with such might, never had he been so fully himself. He knew clearly that now he was no longer merely writing, that now he struggled with life itself and struggled for life, battling for his highest convictions and trying to save his people from destruction. This was his *Dybbol*. Of this period during which *Brand* was taking form he said afterwards "In the midst of my distress and torment I was indescribably happy. I felt the crusader's joy within me, and do not know of anything that I had not courage enough to face." He worked from morning till night and rejoiced in his boundless strength. "I am filled with such active strength and power, I could kill bears."

The first four acts were written within two months. The fifth, growing much longer than he had anticipated, comprised almost a third of the entire play, but in less than three months, before the middle of October, 1865, the drama was completed. By the middle of November a clean copy had been finished and sent to Copenhagen to be printed. It was a work of 271 pages, almost twice as long as *Love's Comedy*, and its completion in so short a period of time was in itself a *tour de force*.

I believe that in giving *Brand* a dramatic form, Ibsen again found help in the poet whose chief work had been present in his mind at the time of the inception of his plan—Fr Paludan Müller. This time the poetic drama *Ahasverus* (1854) had left a resounding echo in Ibsen's mind, and from it he instinctively borrowed his verse form. The entire tone was like that of Paludan Müller, a gaily bitter irony blended with the profoundest seriousness.

Yet Ibsen did not imitate *Ahasverus*. The similarity in tone and phraseology is to be attributed mainly to the spiritual kinship between the two authors. There is perhaps no single writer to whom Ibsen felt more closely related than he did to Paludan Müller, and of whom one can find so many traces in his writings, from his youth to the last great drama of strife, *Rosmersholm*. *Ahasverus* was a poem about Judgment Day. It was an arraignment of the lack of faith and the weakness current among people, and derided contemporary talk about "humanitarianism," "culture," the rights of the majority, and the "lukewarm, oppressive, nauseating" tolerance. These were ideas which could hardly help finding an echo in Ibsen. Yet the tones rise deeply from his own soul, as he now voices the same accusation.

"At the time I wrote *Brand*," he told later, "I kept on my table a scorpion in a tumbler. Now and then the insect became ill. At such times I dropped into the glass a piece of soft fruit which it furiously pounced upon and injected its poison into, whereafter it became well again. Is there not a similarity," he adds, "between this and the writing of poetry? Natural laws are binding even in the spiritual realm."

To him it seemed that a venom gathered within him and that

he found relief and health through his writing, clearing the accounts for himself and for his people at the same time. He had shared their guilt, but he had at least retained within him the demand, which he wished now to present, clear and strong.

From the first to the last act of the new drama we meet constantly the question which had tormented Ibsen during the last years: how long must new generations bear the responsibility for the sins of their fathers? Might they throw off the heritage of wrong, or might they atone for the sin with their own works? This is the burning question in the relation between Brand and his mother, and Ibsen supplies an answer which, if it is unclear on one point, is all the more sharply clear on the other. Brand believes that he can atone by his own deeds for his mother's sin, repaying the "sum of humanity" which she had squandered. But the condition is penitence, a remorse which drives from the heart all inclination towards sin. Such remorse Brand demands and expects from the whole people, and his great disappointment comes when he sees that not one of them is able to rise to a full admission of truth. Therefore his judgment is so harsh, and therefore he sees in the hour of death such dread visions of the future.

At the first appearance of *Brand*, Georg Brandes pointed out that the spirit of Ibsen's writing was expressed in the words of Søren Kierkegaard: "Let others complain that our times are wicked, I complain that they are contemptible, for they are without passion. People's thoughts are thin and miserable as lace girls, the impulses of their hearts are too weak to be sinful."

It was no new complaint. Time and again it had been raised when strong spirits pressed forward with their demand for

fullness and purity of will In the earliest production of his youth, *Die Räuber*, Schiller had uttered his powerful "fie" upon "this slack gelding generation which was good for nothing but to chew the cuds of their forefathers' attainments, and suck the marrow of the old warriors by means of learned dissertations, or dress them up in tragedies" He thirsted for achievement Rousseau, too, turning to give battle to contemporary "culture," had cried out in his youth "I do not blame the present generation for all vices It has only those which attend upon weakness, it only cheats and betrays For those vices that require courage and strength, it is too feeble"

No other man, however, had made this accusation such a pivotal point in his ethical demand as did Kierkegaard He branded pitilessly the man and the race which would not, in the utmost possible degree, "attain self realization," and all his endeavor was concentrated in the cry for complete personal integrity in principle and practice His challenge was turned, without mercy or compromise, against the individual He preferred the honest scoffer to the lukewarm "believer" A twaddler, a sneak, was the most loathsome thing he knew

No man took up the complaint and the demand with so wild an energy as did Henrik Ibsen, and no other work of his proclaims the ideal of truth with such merciless strength as does *Brand*

Time and again, even constantly, as one reads *Brand*, one seems to hear Kierkegaard speak

*Be what you are with all your heart,  
And not by pieces and in part*



Or

*If you cannot be what you ought,  
Be in good earnest what you may*

There is the same unlimited demand for sacrifice, Kierkegaard's "either or" in Ibsen becomes "all or nothing"

*Though you give all, and life remain,  
I tell you that your gift is vain*

Or

*No abatement in distress,  
And for sin no tenderness—  
If life's service God refuse,  
Lose you joyfully must lose*

Or this brand upon him who would seek evasion

*Men! The Devil is compromise!*

There is the admonition to seek for truth within one's own soul

*Inwards! In! O word of might*

And there is the demand to yield the will fully, without compromise

*It is the will alone that matters  
Will alone that mars or makes*

For almost every one of these speeches one can find a corresponding thought in Kierkegaard. Further, one is reminded of Kierkegaard's struggle, of his constant desire to be alone with his truth, and of how the world considered him insane, when one reads in *Brand* the stinging phrase

*—But mad is odd,  
And oddness singleness, you know*

The Dean who says this embodies in himself the official, hypocritical Christianity which Kierkegaard hated, a Christianity which served the State and which made of its preacher an office holder Kierkegaard might well have put his signature to, might indeed even have written, the words of Ibsen's Brand

*And with the best will, no one can*

*Be an official and a man*

Similarly the Mayor, Brand's other opponent, "a full blooded man of the people," is also the spokesman of a thing that Kierkegaard hated, namely, the majority For it was Kierkegaard who first said "The majority is wrong "

Thus Ibsen and Kierkegaard accompany each other from page to page The upshot of it is that Ibsen had now progressed beyond Kierkegaard's "æstheticism" and had become ethical in his thinking He demanded deeds, not words

*A thousand speeches brand*

*Less deeply than one dint of deed*

The fragment which remains of the epic *Brand* concludes with the event of Brand's return to his home community, and relates how, seeing the spiritual need existent there, he mounted the pulpit and preached In the drama he does not preach at all, but goes into the boat and risks his life Here his deeds, speaking for him, inspire faith

It is not in the least strange, therefore, that when *Brand* appeared, people, especially in Denmark, regarded it, so to speak, as Kierkegaard in verse form, and thought that Ibsen had meant to picture Kierkegaard's own life struggle

Ibsen always raised an energetic protest against such asser

tions, and it is clearly evident that the view of life on which *Brand* is built, is deeply and firmly rooted in his own being. The requirement that a man shall be true to himself, true to the best that is in him, is the ethical principle which forms a basis for his writing from the very first. We meet it in *Catharine*, where the hero is brought to his downfall by having sinned against his own ideals. We meet it again in *St. John's Night*, and in *The Vikings*. It is this principle that underlies the sharp inner torment in *Love's Comedy* and that appears as a great power in *The Pretenders*. Now it is the mighty call in *Brand*.

The reader's involuntary association of the drama with Kierkegaard may be attributed to the fact that the subject matter belongs to the realm of church and religion. Ibsen, however, said that this was "entirely insignificant," for "the requirement 'all or nothing' applies to all things in life, in love, in art, etc." And he once wrote to Georg Brandes, with something of Holberg's spirit in his tone: "I should have been quite able to apply the same syllogism with equal propriety to a sculptor or a politician as to a clergyman. I could have found as sure a relief for the mood which drove me to writing if, for instance, I had treated Galileo instead of Brand (with the difference that of course Galileo must remain firm and not admit that the earth stood still), indeed, who knows but that I might, had I been born a hundred years later, have treated with equal propriety you and your fight against Rasmus Nielsen's philosophy of compromise."

All of this may be true enough. In *Brand* itself he denies every suggestion that it is Christianity he wishes to proclaim.

*I speak not as the Church's priest,  
That I'm a Christian, even, I doubt*

This, too, may be compared with a statement of Kierkegaard's "I do not call myself a Christian." But no more for Ibsen than for Kierkegaard was it a matter of accident that the center of his subject was Christianity, for his principle was in the deepest sense not only ethical, it was religious. It was no longer a matter merely of *being* one's self, but just as much of *sacrificing* one's self. It was not a theological dogma, but a fundamental principle of Christianity that "He who loses his life shall find it", and this was the basis of Brand's life philosophy

*Soul, be patient in thy pain!*

*Triumph in its bitter cost*

*All to lose was all to gain*

*Nought abideth but the lost!*

It is a teaching which goes far beyond what is merely human, and no one can ignore the fact that despite everything which is said about a rich and full life, there runs through *Brand* a spirit which may become openly hostile to life, which snaps ferociously at the joy of living. The human being counts for nothing unless he yields himself to God. Therefore Brand must become a priest.

While Ibsen was laboring over his plans for this drama, he quite naturally recalled to mind a minister who had gone through a similar struggle, G. A. Lammers of Skien, a man who had a hand in the circumstances of Ibsen's own life, for it was he who opened the deep chasm of religious difference between Ibsen and his parental home. If Ibsen had broken with Christian teaching, he now showed that there still remained within him much of a genuine Christian spirit.

Lammers had become pastor in Skien in 1848, and Ibsen may

possibly have heard him preach on his last visit home in the spring of 1850. At any rate, Ibsen had heard much about him, for through Lammers's preaching his parents and the other children in the family had become strict Christians after the law, and two members of the family, Hedvig and Ole, had even been led out of the State Church into a free church which wished to be "apostolically Christian." Lammers had felt impelled to make greater and greater demands on true personal Christianity, greater demands than could be harmonized with his official duties in the State Church, and in 1856 he had first resigned his office as clergyman, and had then left the Church. Four or five years later he regretted his action and returned to the Church, but the movement he had started was not wiped out by his retreat, and in his great struggle Henrik Ibsen found many traits which naturally gave life and reality to the character of Brand.

It is especially remarkable that Ibsen's great political disappointment thus little by little took on a religious moral character. While he was still attempting to give *Brand* a narrative form, politics played a large part in his writing. He felt a desire to portray the contrast between the Seventeenth of May speeches and the actual accomplishments. In the drama, on the other hand, there remain only small vestiges of political polemics, vestiges so small that in many places they become almost unnoticeable and difficult to understand for one who has no particular knowledge of what lies behind them. There are satirical references to the boast of past history, and bitter words about "the promises of a people," and attacks on the materialistic struggle for bread. Aside from this there is no direct political chastise

ment, everything is transferred to the field of purely ethical principle

Brand became the consistent representative of Ibsen's own indignation and will "Brand is myself in my best moments," he once wrote later. It was thus that he wished he might have been. Only in this way could he speak to the conscience of his people.

With suspense, often with fear and terror, we follow Brand in his struggle. Time and again we ask ourselves if he will not bend. But no! he refuses to feed his people so long as they will not yield their hearts to God. He refuses the consolation of religion to his own mother so long as she will not cast aside everything that binds her to the earth. For a moment he draws back when death threatens to rob him of wife and child, and the old doctor who has so much understanding of human nature good humoredly scoffs at him:

*So tender to his own distress  
And to the world so merciless!*

The doctor holds up the mirror to him

*—Alas, alas,  
Is this a Titan's portraiture?*

But after a little while Brand has overcome the temptation, he lets his wife and child die rather than desert his duty and calling.

We may be concerned about him in earnest, when the Mayor comes to announce that he has won the majority for his cause. We immediately ask if Brand can find it possible to reconcile his personal principle of truth with the will of the masses. Will not his central idea now be warped? But Brand withstands the

and his wife to the stern law all or nothing If Gerd asks him in his last moments

*Man, why wept'st thou not till now?*

we remember that we have earlier seen tears in his eyes, and have seen him bowed, or very nearly bowed, in prayer Indeed, in the truest sense he had raised no demands too high for fulfillment, for it was not ability he required, but an honest will

The closing words of the drama remain as a great question mark over the entire work Interpreting it in Kierkegaard's spirit we might say that the God who had determined Brand's life for him was exactly this "deus caritatis", that God had in His love made him lonely and unhappy, had given him "the gift of sorrow," not for the writing of poetry, but as something on which he might live and by which he might be saved, that in His love He now received him, since he had sacrificed and lost all, that if Brand had suffered humiliation among people, he had thereby saved himself and gained communion with God, the highest of all things

*—A will that's whole—*

*A soaring faith, a single soul,*

*The willingness to lose, that gave*

*Itself rejoicing to the grave*

*A crown of thorns on every brow—*

*That is the wage you're earning now!*

Kierkegaard had required this martyrdom of the true Christian Brand, then, did but receive God's approval upon his life It was to *him* that God came as "deus caritatis"

It is a solution which we cannot readily accept It becomes too philosophical, it does not proceed clearly and directly from the

drama, but must be forced upon our thought. Even then it does not satisfy. Besides, Ibsen once defined the love referred to in his Latin phrase. When his friends who knew Latin objected to the word "caritas" as not being truly classical Latin, he answered that the word was taken from modern Catholic Latin, where it meant heavenly love "with an added meaning of mercy."

By it he introduced a thought which Brand had always brushed scornfully aside. The voice from heaven proclaimed a thing that Brand had not understood, declared that in one thing he had been lacking—merciful love. And we recall that the phrase had been used on an earlier occasion in the drama, by the kind and wise old doctor who had said to Brand

*Yes, in your ledger, truly, Will  
Has enough entries and to spare  
But, priest, your Love-account<sup>a</sup> is still  
A virgin-chapter, blank and bare"*

It is the very phrase that returned to Brand in the hour of death, and now, for the first time, he understood it. Through pain and suffering he had grown toward it, for it is to be remembered that Brand is not the same man throughout all five acts of the drama. The thing which makes the poem drama is the fact that contradictions exist in him and drive him step by step on to a higher view of life. At first he was the cold, hard, critical judge, who dreamed of shaking all the world out of its complacency. But the dream was relinquished when he realized that he must sacrifice himself and devote his work to those who needed him. From Agnes he began to learn of love

<sup>a</sup> The original uses the phrase "conto caritatis."



Though the dark memories of his childhood had almost dried out of him the ability to love, the need was there, and by one trial after another it was driven more and more strongly to the fore. Denying this need of his own heart, he sinned against his mother, and still more against Agnes, the glorious symbol of self-sacrificing love. But it was hard for him to resist. Longing both to weep and pray, he forced himself to refrain, yet it was his last great joy when all was lost, that now he could weep and bend his knees in prayer. He had been able to abandon the coldness of the law for the summer sunlight of love.

His final destruction, then, is not merely the defeat which a lonely man must suffer at the hands of society. It was *inevitable* that he should lose, because there was a flaw in himself. He had sinned against one of God's greatest commandments. Herein lies the tragic element, here, as always in Ibsen, the defeat lies within the man.

His life work, however, is not thereby condemned. On the contrary, Ibsen has Brand declare with the utmost clearness at the very end of the play that "free and wide awake" he would sacrifice everything anew, even wife and child, rather than give up the demand, "all or nothing." It is not the requirement that is wrong, but the man, being unable to reconcile it with the commandment of love, has proved that he is not great enough for it. Yet now, in his defeat, his eyes have been opened to this truth also, and the defeat is thereby turned into victory, as he had at one time dreamed that it might be.

*The day will come when we shall know  
That triumph's height is Overthrow*

Ibsen has thus made no compromise in his requirement of the will, that he has upheld in the very "jaws of Death " What he has done is to make the requirement richer and warmer, thereby building up for it new hopes

*On through Death On into Night —  
Dawn beyond glows rosy bright*

## Chapter Eighteen

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### VICTORY

NEVER in his life before had Ibsen been in such suspense about a book, as while waiting for the appearance of *Brand*. Conscious that he had never before given himself so completely, he was filled with hope—and with dread. While he believed in his work with “the most unshakable conviction,” he expected “struggles and attacks of all sorts” to follow upon its appearance, and the thought made him tremble with apprehension. His intention had been to go to work now upon the historical drama about Magnus Hæmneson, which seemed already fully matured within him, but month after month passed, and he was unable to begin. The publication of *Brand* was delayed, and in the meantime he was “consumed with suspense and unrest.” He was impatient with the publisher, who raised difficulties, and as he could not bring himself to ask for more money in advance, his pockets were time and again woefully empty. “Dear Björnson,” he wrote in a letter, “it seems to me that I am separated by an endless desert from both God and man.” The suspense robbed him completely of his strength.

In the summer of 1865, Björnson had secured from his own publisher, Hegel of Gyldendal in Copenhagen, a promise to publish the book which Ibsen had then said was almost ready, a drama on the subject of Julian the Apostate. Hegel had then been in charge of the old Gyldendal House for almost twenty

years, and had developed a market in Norway and Sweden as well as in Denmark, and after about 1860 he placed an increasingly great stress on publishing books with a view toward an all-Scandinavian business. Björnson's visit in 1861 had given new impetus to this work, and, having both capital and initiative for the undertaking, Hegel built up a stronger and stronger economic and literary Scandinavianism.

After Björnson came Ibsen, and Hegel undertook the publication of 1250 copies of his book, offering a royalty of thirty Danish rix dollars per sheet, and sending an advance payment at once. The first one third of the manuscript arrived in Copenhagen by mail early in November, 1865, and since Ibsen begged earnestly that the book be finished by Christmas, Hegel immediately let it go to the printer.

The publisher had taken note, however, of the fact that Ibsen used his own orthography, especially in the matter of doubling the consonant to indicate the shortness of a preceding vowel, and that in addition he employed many markedly Norwegian words. Apprehensive lest the Danes would not buy the book, Hegel wrote a complaint to Ibsen, who immediately gave him permission to change the spelling "so far as it can now be done without loss of time."

Continuing his reading of the drama, Hegel became aware that it was not at all the book of which Björnson had spoken, and he grew still more apprehensive. So long a drama in verse he feared "the general public" would not care for. Even the contents of the book made him especially "diffident." Writing to Ibsen anew about his anxiety, he said that he did not dare to print more than one half of the edition, 625 copies, which of

course would yield only half the royalty agreed upon. Again Ibsen conformed to his wish. To him it was a matter of particular importance to get the book out as soon as possible.

Ill fate would have it that his answer never reached its destination. So Hegel waited. And Ibsen waited. And the book lay there until Hegel at last took it upon himself to publish it in accordance with the old agreement, in an edition of 1250 copies. This was in the middle of March, 1866.

Hegel's apprehension proved to be in no way justified. Despite double consonants and Norwegian words, the long poetic drama of 270 pages had a sweeping sale, in Denmark as well as in Norway. Within two months he had, so few copies left that he printed a new edition, though only of 500 copies. A third printing was made in August, a fourth in December. Such a thing was unheard of. Yet this was not all. New printings, larger and larger, had to be made during the next few years. When a sister-in-law of Ibsen's enthusiastically prophesied ten printings, the author doubtfully shook his head, but the tenth printing was made in 1895, and still it was not the last.

Of chief importance, after all, was the fact that *Brand* was not only a poetic work which people might read with enjoyment. The poetic form was the thing that occupied them least; it was the content, the thought, that held them. The burning intensity of the drama swept them along. In nearly all newspaper reviews there was a repetition of the phrase "a powerful impression." The young Georg Brandes wrote in the Danish *Dagbladet*: "This book will leave no reader cold. Every receptive and undulled mind is aware, when the reading is finished, of a disturbing, even an overwhelming sense of having stood face to face

with a strong and indignant spirit, before whose penetrating gaze weakness is compelled to let its eyes fall ”

The book seemed addressed to the conscience of each reader Through the entire drama resounded the challenge that held everyone responsible “Choose, you stand upon the crossways” To each individual it became a personal question—all or nothing? It shook the souls like a Judgment Day sermon

Only a month after the appearance of the book, a correspondent in Copenhagen wrote to the Norwegian *Morgenbladet* “In the literary events of recent times Henrik Ibsen’s drama, *Brand*, published here, holds a pre eminence seldom attained by any poetic work It is read with the greatest interest, its praise is in every mouth, and its weighty words fill every one’s thought ” *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* confirmed this report, its correspondent in Copenhagen wrote that the talk everywhere was of *Brand*, so that a Norwegian who chanced to be there had to beg for mercy But when the correspondent reached Oslo he found the same state of affairs Pastor W A Wexels spoke of *Brand* in one of the last sermons he preached in Our Saviour’s Church (April 15) *Brand* was the topic for conversation in all circles

The effect of the book in Norway can be compared with that of Welhaven’s poem *The Dawn of Norway* a generation earlier, in 1834 Ibsen himself must undoubtedly have had a feeling that he followed in the footsteps of Welhaven In the epic poem which was the first form of *Brand*, he had openly caricatured a Seventeenth of May speech by Welhaven’s great opponent, Henrik Wergeland *Brand*, like *The Dawn of Norway*, was intended to be a national chastisement, and Ibsen had been

apprehensive lest he bring upon himself as terrible a storm as that which had descended upon Welhaven. Personal persecution was absent this time, but the storm aroused by *The Dawn of Norway* was like a tempest in a tea cup compared with the one which followed *Brand*. *The Dawn of Norway* called out an angry protest in certain literary and political circles, *Brand* stirred the entire people.

If one would fully understand the tremendous effect of *Brand*, one must remember that the book appeared in the midst of the most powerful movement for individualism in social and intellectual life. *Brand* made the individual the hub around which everything in the world must turn, it impressed the element of personal will on the minds of people as it had never been done before, and made the individual conscience the battleground on which all questions were to be decided. If *Brand* perished in his lonely battle, he was still right, and society was wrong. And never before had the world been so well prepared to receive and appropriate to itself this doctrine of individualism.

The sixties were the heyday of liberalism in Europe. On every hand the workingmen's program was the liberation of the individual. The emancipation of the peasants in Russia and of the slaves in America seemed to carry out the program in the social realm. Socialistic thoughts and theories were a sheer terror to the leading powers in popular opinion as well as in governments. All the old revolutionary group—Mazzini, Kossuth—turned their attack against socialism, and cried only for freedom. Among statesmen as well as among scholars the *laissez-faire* theory in politics held sway stronger than ever.

before The commercial treaty between England and France in 1860 constituted the great victory for free trade in Europe, and when the Norwegian Storting in November, 1865, confirmed the new commercial treaty with France, the same policy became victorious in Norway The same Storting, by means of a law passed on April 14, 1866, annihilated the last remains of the guild system in the country, giving complete freedom to the trades in the cities. Norway thus joined in the European policy of freedom, and the spirit which made progress in social and State affairs, rose with increasing power in the intellectual world Revolt against authority, separation from the Church and the teachings of the Church, conflicts between new science and old faith, were current to an extent which forced every man to reconstruct his view of life In scientific research as in capitalism there was a reckless boldness which flung aside whatever was old, and demanded a free field for individual endeavor No other time has known such faith in the will and powers of the individual It is this that stamps the period with a certain grandeur Bjornson expressed it in joyous song at the close of the sixties "Proud battle time, in which we join!" But if we seek to know what gave reality to Norway's participation in the movement, we can find no one thing of greater importance than Ibsen's *Brand* Individualism has not created a mightier work of literary art It is deeply rooted in the age that fostered it, and at the same time it exalts the fundamental thought of that age with such power as to infuse into it new ideals Individualism becomes an ethical principle With the appearance of *Brand* we may mark the beginning of a new period in Norwegian intellectual life



It would be false to say that the teachings of the poem were received without opposition. In Denmark the ground had been so carefully prepared by Kierkegaard that here they could more easily win assent, and the national humiliation of 1864 had made the minds receptive to the thought of seeking restoration in the inner life. Here, then, *Brand* could fall in with a movement already in progress.

Not so in Norway. Here the drama brought accusations and chastisement to the people, and its exactions seemed unnaturally severe. The first newspaper review that appeared, written by the young littérateur, Johan Vibe, for the paper *Norge*, April 3, 1866, expressed its opinion in the phrase "brilliant madness." A. O. Vinje, in *The Dalesman*, also thought that *Brand* was "too wildly insane to be taken seriously," and J. Lieblein in the periodical *Norden* found that Brand ended in "insanity." Björnson declared the book made him ill, and came to hate it, for he thought that it did away with all true religion, and that it possessed none of the love which might have made of it true poetry. Professor Monrad wrote a series of philosophical essays in *Morgenbladet*, expounding that such a "seeking after extremes" as that of Brand, showed "a misconception of the pure nature of the idea." The true self-sacrifice consisted precisely in consenting to compromise. The pastor at Vestnes, "Little Theodor," warned against the unchristian spirit in *Brand*, and maintained that the Mayor in the play was right.

Thus opposition came from various sources and on various grounds: from a smug bourgeois spirit that shrank from staking life on an ideal or, on the other hand, from a healthy realism, an understanding of life that turned away from all strain and

unnatural distortion Or one might raise the objection which had formerly been raised against *Love's Comedy*, that there was no true artistic expiation in the drama And there was much disputing about what Ibsen had really meant—whether Brand was finally “disavowed by the author” or fell only because everyone was against him

None of these things could prevent *Brand* from engaging the interest, especially of the young people, with unusual power Again and again the book was read, verse after verse was imprinted in the memory, to become an active slogan in thought and speech Almost every one of the quotations that I have cited in the preceding chapter is known and used everywhere in the land They belong to our general treasury of speech, as do passages from the Bible, and there is hardly another single work, by Ibsen or by anyone else, which has added to our language so many pithy epigrams as *Brand* Not only the generation of 1866 accepted *Brand* as a gospel, new generations for twenty years took the drama into their hearts, finding it an inspiration for will and action

In March, 1866, Björnson wrote of the book “In two months it will be dead”, but in 1878, finding himself in the midst of a difficult religious struggle, he wrote to Georg Brandes “I now understand *Brand* better I did not grasp it before, but you shall see that the book will some day come back Now, for the first time, I am vastly grateful to Ibsen for it I have not been able to feel so before” Björnson’s mind at this time began to work upon a new subject which at bottom contained the same question as *Brand*, and which developed into his drama *Beyond Our Power*, finally completed four or five years later, in 1883 The

question was one of agreement between faith and life, between ideal and action, and Björnson's solution was different from Ibsen's. In the epic form, Brand's prayer had been "Teach me to will more than I can," and in the drama he constantly raises the same demand. Björnson, on the other hand, wished to show in *Beyond Our Power* that the will, if it is to be salutary and helpful, must be kept within the bounds of human ability. He sought a human solution of the problem. A still more human one was given by Arne Garborg, who raised the same question in his drama *The Teacher*, in 1896. While he sternly demanded sacrifice from the individual, he added the mild words "Not of everyone is the same sacrifice required."

The thought can thus be followed through the three greatest dramatic works in Norwegian literature. There are differences in the manner of stating the problem, and even wider differences in the manner of solving it, but the question burns with equal heat, boring its way into the conscience, and the underlying principle remains equally strong and immovable—fidelity to one's self, *truth* in every relation of life.

The demand for such uprightness of conscience had already been raised by Henrik Weigeland in his poetry, particularly in the great work of which he would have made a bible for humanity, *Creation, Man, and Messiah*; but Ibsen was the first to succeed in surrounding with an atmosphere of life the people who were surcharged by this ideal. In *Love's Comedy* he had made it the law for one single relation in life, in *Brand* he made it binding upon the conscience for all aspects of life. Through year after year that followed it was to be the fundamental subject of his writing. More than that, it was to form

an issue in intellectual life for two decades, and was to leave its mark on the literature of all three Scandinavian countries

The youth which was later responsible for the radical eighties in these countries, had its consecration from Ibsen, and particularly from *Brand*. It actually became a sort of devotional book to the young people in Sweden who at that time gathered about August Strindberg. One member of that generation, Gustaf af Geijerstam, bears witness of how they were touched. "It would be vain to attempt a description of the unbounded enthusiasm with which the youth of whom I speak, read and discussed the great poet—Ibsen became a binding tie between friends and lovers, no one could offer anyone a gift more sacred than *Brand*. it was a tribute to intelligence and to character."

It was in Sweden, too, and during these very eighties that *Brand* was first presented on the stage.

Ibsen, not having written the drama with the intention that it should be played, did not submit it to any theater. Laura Gundersen presented the fourth act in 1866, as a dramatic entertainment at the Students' Association, and later she played this act several times at the Christiania Theater. She was attracted by the heart breaking conflict in Agnes between motherly love and Brand's demand for sacrifice, and we are told that she played the part of Agnes with gripping, powerful art.

The Swede, Ludvig Josephson, was the first one to produce all of *Brand*. While manager of the Christiania Theater for a time during the seventies, he mentioned to Ibsen his desire to bring *Brand* upon the stage, but nothing came of the plan before 1885, and then it was presented at his theater in Stockholm. On the first evening the performance lasted for almost seven hours, yet the



THE LAST ACT OF BRIND  
IN THE PRODUCTION AT NVA TEATERN,  
STOCKHOLM, IN 1885

*Drawing by Bertil Nyström (after)*



audience listened attentively up to the last minute, deeply stirred "*Brand*," wrote Gustaf af Geijerstam in his report to *Aftonbladet*, "has for many members of the younger generation been something of a bible, and the impression on Tuesday, when the play appeared on the stage of the New Theater, was powerful. It seemed as if a strong wind blew through the auditorium, sweeping away every memory of the operetta and the farce, making the room high and the air clean." Josephson had built a setting which strengthened the effect of the spiritual content of the play, one had, at the same time, impressions of being crushed and of being lifted among high, steep mountains. Emil Hillberg played Brand, with a remarkable ability to give the character a stamp of true greatness. The following evenings it was possible to shorten the time of playing to five and one half hours, but the demands upon the audience were still great, and it gives clear evidence of the drama's fascination that despite its length it was played sixteen times.

The next attempt at staging *Brand* was made by Lugné Poë in Paris, in 1895. But he had little ability to reveal the power and richness of the drama, and when the Swede, August Lindberg, traveled about Norway, Sweden, and Denmark with it in 1895-96, the spirit had already departed from it. All that remained was declamation and a series of events for dramatic effect. The Schiller Theater in Berlin ventured to present *Brand* at the celebration of Ibsen's seventieth birthday, in 1898. As I chanced to be in Berlin at the time, I had the opportunity to see the German presentation. To me it seemed utter parody, and the German spectators must have looked upon the drama as something foreign and strange, rather than as a revelation of the

human soul Quite different was its success at the same time in Copenhagen, where Martinus Nielsen played Brand at the Dagmar Theater before the eyes of Ibsen himself If Martinus Nielsen was somewhat monotonous and colorless in his declamation, he had still some of the enthusiasm and intense strength that lived in Brand, and he was able to wrest, as it were, the victory from untoward circumstances

The event came too late, however, for the play to have the same spiritual effect that it had in Stockholm in 1885 Its work in Danish intellectual life was long ago completed The same was true in other countries

*Brand* was the first of Ibsen's plays to be translated into German A German commercial traveler, P F Siebold, who was often in Denmark, and who was fond of poetry, translated the entire book into German verse in 1869, and had the translation printed in Copenhagen and ready for sale early in 1872 Later there were other translations, by Julie Ruhkopf in 1874, by Alfr v Wolzogen in 1876, by Ludwig Passarge in 1881 But none of these versions served to create an understanding of the power in Ibsen's work They were either too free, so that the incisive power of verse and thought was lost, or they adhered so closely to the original that they lost the native freshness Not before 1898 did a genuine poet, spiritually attuned to the work, Christian Morgenstern, try his hand at *Brand* In his translation the drama won popularity at the German theaters It was played in Munich in 1902, in Dresden in 1905, and later in other German cities It now struck directly into the hearts of its spectators, though it was impossible that it should arouse interest and fire enthusiasm now as it might have done thirty



years earlier Through his other works Ibsen had already had a hand in creating a new intellectual atmosphere in Germany

In Norway *Brand* did not appear on the stage in complete form before 1904, when it was played at the National Theater with a success that warranted its repetition twenty nine times during the season of 1904-05 It was repeated several times later, and in the fall of 1922 it was played fully thirty four times Egil Elde attained greater success as Brand than in any previous role He was firm and powerful, and introduced, at least in the last acts, an undercurrent of longing for love by which Brand was brought humanly closer to us than he could be by mere reading The drama was thus to some extent given a new interpretation by which the psychological element appeared more strongly than the preaching—a change which had already taken place with other dramas by Ibsen, giving them a new significance in our literature More remarkable than any thing else in the play, however, was the Gerd created by Johanne Dybwad She seemed to come from another world filled with desolation and wildness, and she struck like a hawk into the heart of Brand and of all who saw her So bold a creature of fantasy is seldom seen on the stage Gerd seemed to be Fate itself coming to fetch its prey Such an interpretation was in the true spirit of the dramatist, carrying us beyond the realism which otherwise in too many respects weighed down the presentation and made the symbolism of the text too palpable

The people who best succeeded in restoring complete life to the drama, however, were the Russians When, in the twentieth century, interest in Ibsen began to advance in earnest among the

Russians, there was no other work of his that took hold and kindled enthusiasm as did *Brand*. The Moscow Art Theater included it in its program in January, 1907, and later traveled with it all over Russia. It was more than an artistic triumph, for it seemed to answer fully the rising need for idealism in the Russian people. Maria Geimanova, who played Agnes, has told about the effect of the play. "Its thoughts," she writes, "fall in so completely with our times and do so quench the thirst which is prevalent in a special way in Russian society, that people listened with the same eagerness as if one offered them sparkling fresh water in the most terrific heat. The storm of appreciative applause which followed Brand's great speech outside the new church building is not to be described. All arose with one accord, and there was not an indifferent face in the auditorium." Five years later, in 1912, a Russian company under Pavel Orlenjeff played *Brand* for the people of his own nationality in New York, in a small East Side theater. The triumph was equally great here, and again the spectators were most strongly carried away by the same scene in the last act.

Thus we can follow the effects of *Brand* down to our own days and out to distant parts of the world. Never before had Ibsen written a book which gained such power over people.

Nor had he ever before given himself so completely in any work as he did in *Brand*. Here he appeared as a man with authority, a man who knew what he wanted, and who felt free and strong enough to point the way of progress to his people.

He had suddenly taken a position of leadership in Norwegian intellectual life, and had at the same time attained living conditions which gave him freedom to devote himself to the work



JOHANNE DYBWAD AS GERD IN *BRIND* IN 1911  
INTRODUCTION AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN OSLO



of writing for the rest of his life. At last he had found a sure economic footing.

The most persistently active man in securing this for him was Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Throughout the years 1864 and 1865 he had labored at collecting money for Ibsen among friends and acquaintances, and without this source of help Ibsen could hardly have managed to exist. In the spring of 1865 Bjørnson forwarded an application from Ibsen to the Royal Norwegian Scientific Society in Nidaros, an organization which at that time gave financial aid to writers. Bjørnson requested that it should now, as a matter of justice, give support to Ibsen as it had formerly given it to himself and to A. O. Vinje. The application arrived too late, but Bjørnson sent a new one the next fall, describing the economic difficulties under which Ibsen labored and how the sense of being slighted had preyed upon his mind. To this application there could be no answer before the following spring, but Bjørnson had other plans to fall back on. He tried to persuade the Christiania Theater to give an evening's entertainment for Ibsen's benefit, and he thought that a new assistantship at the University Library might hold out some promise for Ibsen. At the same time Ibsen's "Hollander" friends considered a small customs appointment for him. Bjørnson was sheer enthusiasm when he set out to accomplish anything, and "if necessary," he wrote to Ibsen in the summer of 1865, "I will go to the attack in contempt of death. Your money or your life, you wretches! A poet is dying!" However, he had no fear that matters would come to such a pass. "Deuced if you'll die. You are tough, courageous, and lazy, such people never die."

Another plan of Björnson's was to secure for Ibsen a poet's stipend such as had been granted to himself. Already in the spring of 1865 he presented to the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, old Riddervold, a request that he recommend such action to the Government. But Riddervold had not forgotten *Love's Comedy*, and he remained cold, as he had been two years earlier. Still Björnson did not give up hope. He persistently urged Ibsen to make application before the Storting met in the fall. The Storting must give the money, he wrote.

Ibsen had little faith in this. Writing back to Björnson in the midst of his work on *Brand*, he said: "I have a premonition that my new book will not tend to make the members of the Storting more friendly toward me, but may God punish me if that consideration can move me to strike out a single line, however it may suit these souls of vestpocket size. Rather than do that, let me be a beggar for life. If I cannot be myself in what I write, all my effort is lying and humbug, of which our country has enough without voting stipends to supply itself with more."

He asked for nothing. He applied to neither Government nor Storting, nor did he seek ever to renew his traveling stipend. "I know too well that it would be a wasted humiliation," he wrote to Björnson on March 4, 1866.

Then *Brand* appeared, and in a flash the Norwegian people knew what a great poet they possessed in Ibsen. Björnson translated the thought into deed. He did not like *Brand*, but he saw the genius behind the work, he believed that Ibsen had not succeeded wholly in transforming the subject matter into poetry and hoped that favorable circumstances might give him that "clarity of love in his view of life, which alone makes a poet."

Bjornson spoke to his friends in the Storting and spoke to Minister Riddervold anew. The Minister remained immovable, but the Storting yielded. One of Bjornson's friends, Doctor T. J. Löberg from Bergen, formulated a motion for giving the poet's stipend to Ibsen, and secured for it twenty-eight signatures, among them those of all the leading liberals—Sheriff H. O. Christensen, the president of the lower house, Johan Sverdrup, the president of the upper house, Headmaster Steen, Attorney Richter, and others. Their motion was dated April 17, 1866. It closed with these words: "We cannot remain calmly looking on while a mind so highly talented and productive perishes in the struggle for the necessities of daily life, and we turn, therefore, with our request for a financial contribution to ease Ibsen's circumstances, to that source whence in our opinion it should be sought and by which it should be cheerfully given, namely, the national assembly, which, in granting Ibsen the money for future subsistence, will certainly in an equally high degree honor and benefit itself and him."

No one could feel entirely sure that the motion would pass the Storting. Only one or two of the farmer members had been willing to sign, and the Government party was also uncertain. Then it chanced that Riddervold became ill, and that Frederik Stang, then head of the Government, had temporary charge of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Through his son-in-law, Attorney J. Heffermehl, Ibsen's "Hollander" friends found out that Stang was willing to make a Government motion regarding the author's stipend. They grasped the opportunity. Director of the Public Record Office Birkeland composed an application to the Department and sent it on April 19, signed

also by O A Bøhke, Botten Hansen, and Jakob Løkke Two days later the Department had its motion ready It was passed by the Government in Oslo and was immediately sent ~~to the~~ King at Stockholm

Ibsen, in the meanwhile, was in Rome, and knew nothing of all this before he received a telegram from Birkeland saying that he must send an application for an author's stipend directly to the King On April 15, he composed a letter to King Carl Twenty years later he thought that this letter "had quite a tone of balderdash," but at least it gave evidence of his courage and honesty At last he ventured to ask directly for means to devote himself exclusively to his calling as a writer His effort was made in the interests of his calling, the work of "awakening the people to great thoughts" "It rests," he wrote, "in Your Majesty's royal hand if I shall silently submit to the most bitter renunciation which can be required of a human soul, the renunciation of my life work, the surrender in a battle in which I know that it has been given me to fight with the sword of the spirit This to me would be a ten fold difficulty, for"—here he repeats a phrase which he had earlier put into the mouth of Brand—"to this day I have never made a retreat"

Perhaps Ibsen already recognized in King Carl something more than the "corporal" at whom he had scoffed in *Brand*, for he closed his letter by saying that in his life work he had "enlisted as a soldier under Your Majesty's spiritual banner" The respectful gesture proved in this case to be superfluous The letter reached Stockholm on April 25, and "upon His Majesty's gracious command" Prime Minister Sjöbom immediately sent



it to the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs in Oslo, for "further action" Here it was laid aside, for the very next day the proposal from the Norwegian Government reached Stockholm, and the King could sign a government bill in the matter

Both the bill and the motion of the twenty eight Storting members were brought before the Storting on May 12, and an author's stipend for Ibsen, consisting of 400 specie-dollars a year, was granted, against an opposition of only four votes

On April 30 the Scientific Society in Nidaros had granted him 100 specie-dollars, and on July 28 he received from the government a new traveling stipend of 350 specie-dollars Altogether he then had for the next year 850 specie-dollars If he had previously struggled with financial difficulties, he was now so rich that he found it unnecessary to claim all of the royalty due from his publisher He could begin playing in the lottery, he could buy fine clothes, he felt free and untrammelled

Georg Brandes pointed out the fine irony in the fact that Norway answered the dramatist's harsh chastisement by giving him a permanent means of livelihood—"a graceful act which perhaps few had expected" from the Norwegian people Ibsen, however, felt that he had received no more than his due In a speech at the burial of the historian P A Munch in the summer of 1865, he had declared it to be the duty of the State, nay, even a condition for national existence, to give staunch support to scholarly work and to art He spoke from his own strong conviction when he said "The man who performs an intellectual service in a nation had a right to carry his head high" While his own case was before the Storting, he wrote to Birkeland "If

the petition is not granted, my work in Norway is ended" It seemed to him at the time that, if his people now rejected him, he was for all time separated from them

Norway held him fast And, surely, he could not at any time have severed himself from his country He was like Brand, he hated it because he loved it These were the people that stirred his anger, but also the people whom he felt compelled to chastise And this was life to him Nothing that he had written had been so deeply rooted both in Norwegian life and in his own spirit as *Brand* At the same time, the book raised him above his people He spoke to them from within and from without at the same time He became a Norwegian poet chieftain, and in this very fact he had a basis for authorship whereby he might win the world

